

JUNE

THE SUSPENSE MAGAZINE



25¢

# DETECTIVE TALES



THE BLONDE  
DIES TWICE!

by FRANCIS K. ALLAN

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AMERICA'S MOST UNUSUAL DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

# DETECTIVE TALES

25c



Combined with F.B.I. DETECTIVE STORIES

VOL. FIFTY-ONE

JUNE, 1953

NUMBER ONE

#### *Three Crime-Mystery Novelettes*

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—but she'll never rest easy in her grave until Eddie joins her!		
STRANGERS IN THE HOUSE! . . . . .	Richard Deming	38
—was what Harry found . . . But who could find Harry's wife?		
DEATH-DANCE FOR A DEBUTANTE . . . . .	Tiah Devitt	84
—to the only kind of music the Grigorios understood—tommygun orchestra!		

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#### *Action-Packed Short Stories*

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—brought killers to Johnny's peaceful fishing barge. . . . .		
HEART SHOT . . . . .	Dean Evans	65
—was waiting for Lonnlie, if he wasn't both lucky and smart!		
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—there's nothing to stop the underworld from taking over the town!		

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# They claim this coupon brings you “good luck”



"Six months after mailing the coupon, I had a promotion and a big raise in pay!"

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**Call it being "lucky" or being "smart." Whatever it is, you're one step closer to your goal when you mail this famous coupon!**

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  - Auto Body Rebuilding and Refinishing
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Working Hours \_\_\_\_\_

A.M. to \_\_\_\_\_

P.M. \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada



## THE CRIME CLINIC

**G**REETINGS, friends. Anyone who ever stepped outside the straight and narrow will tell you that Police Departments are made up of very brainy, curious, hard-to-fool gentlemen. And, of course, they're right about cops' intelligence. What most crooks don't know, though, is that they have a lot more than just the intelligence of most policemen to contend with.

We're talking about the equipment you'll find in any well-equipped, modern crime lab. Here, for example, is Bess Ritter's account of the gentleman who makes law-enforcement gadgets—and of some of the gadgets he makes:

If Sherlock Holmes had known a man named John A. Dondero, his reputation as a detective would have been twice as far-reaching. Because Mr. Dondero, who is president and scientific director of an unusual institution called Faurot Inc., spends his entire business day dreaming up ways to catch even the world's most wariest lawbreaker.

This work consists of manufacturing crime-fighting equipment which includes everything from badges, nightsticks and whistles to lock-picking tools, microscopes,

wire tapping equipment, wire tape recorders and intercommunication systems. He sells these items only to all those who hold an authoritative position on the law's right side, all the way from the small town sheriff to municipal and state police departments.

And, as a hobby—in his spare time—Mr. Dondero runs a highly efficient school for such persons. It specializes in up-to-the-minute criminology techniques, especially in regard to fingerprinting and identification. Result: Thousands of true-to-life "whodunits" are either solved annually by Faurot graduates, or their perpetrators trapped via merchandise bearing this firm's trademark.

Some of these items are so uncanny, that far less criminals, undoubtedly, would trust their liberty to an underworld life if they knew how easily Dondero can catch them. Like a special white trick powder that is absolutely invisible when sprinkled on tabletops, chairs and et al. That is, until such objects are touched by human hands, when the perspiration in the skin mixes with the powder and produces deep and hard-to-eradicate stains. One case—among many—in which its usefulness was proven took

(Continued on page 114)

# COULD YOU SELL NYLONS AT 49¢?

Would you like to earn up to \$3 an hour for your spare time? **YOU CAN DO IT!** It makes no difference whether you are 18 or 80—whether you ever sold anything before or not—whether you have one hour or fifty hours a week to spare. You don't have to be a "salesman" or "saleswoman" because this isn't "selling"—it's more like giving something away. We'll establish you in your own business at our expense! You pay nothing—risk nothing!

Women buy over two million pairs of nylons every day. Most pay \$1.35 to \$1.95 the pair. Suppose you offered finest quality, nationally advertised nylons at 49¢ a pair, what woman would hesitate to order? Yet, that is all they cost if they run or snag within guarantee period up to THREE WHOLE MONTHS! This sensational low cost includes your commission, bonus and even postage.

There is nothing for you to buy or deliver. Nothing to learn or study. You can start making money one hour after receiving the free outfits. Just show the line—the amazing written guarantee of free replacement—display the free samples given to you and write orders. Could anything be easier?

We deliver and collect. You get cash in advance on every order you write and can easily earn the huge cash bonus that increases your earnings by 40%. You can never know how easy it is for you to get a steady extra income until you have the free, complete money-making Kendex outfit. Your ONLY cost is a stamp to mail the coupon. Send it today! You pay nothing now or later. Show the outfit to 5 women. That's all. When you see how eager women will be to give you orders, you'll thank your lucky stars that you answered this advertisement.

## ADDITIONAL LINES FOR EXTRA CASH

The amazing hosiery lines, guaranteed against everything up to one full year are more than enough to give you a steady income, but you can triple this income with these additional lines:

### GREETING CARDS

Could you sell beautiful all occasion cards, retail value 15c, for only 2½c each? You'll have a wonderful line from the world's largest manufacturer of greeting cards, including gift items, stationery, gift wrappings etc. You can just write orders. Company will deliver and collect. Coupon brings ALL outfits!

### COSMETICS

Complete line of world acclaimed cosmetics for complexion loveliness, bathtime beauty and good grooming. A huge field that will give you a steady income. You can quickly become a beauty specialist. You don't have to buy or deliver anything. Just write orders!

## KENDEX CORPORATION

BABYLON 19, N. Y.

Kendex Corporation Date.....  
Babylon 19, N.Y.

Send me, free and prepaid, all money-making outfits and free samples. It is understood I am under no obligation and if I am not delighted, I may throw the outfits away.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

# ODDITIES IN CRIME

By JAKOBSSON and STONE



To most of London—and even to his wife—Alan Ivor Phillips was a scholarly, conservative gentleman, deriving a comfortable income from his real estate business. To nearly all of England, Philip Devereux was a master burglar, of whom the authorities knew little beyond his name. One day, when two policemen called on Phillips on a purely routine matter, he excused himself, went into the next room, and came back shooting—as Philip Devereux! Nobody will ever know why, for in the ensuing scuffle he was fatally wounded by one of his own bullets. The unsuspecting policemen were unarmed—and neither was hurt!

In Atlanta, Ga., Mrs. David Rice did one of those big washes, laundered all the family underwear, hung it out to dry. Next thing, thieves had cleaned out the clothesline. Realizing the family had nothing to wear tomorrow, Mrs. Rice rushed out to buy new clothing—and got home to find the thieves had swiped her washing machine!



Harold Kirby of Roxbury, Mass., was sentenced to twelve years in prison for a 1928 holdup, in which he had not participated. His widowed mother scrimped and saved for the next ten years to finance a private campaign to free her son. At last she obtained a position as a servant in the household of Harry Longo, and there got the proof she needed that Longo was the guilty man.

But innocent Kirby spent ten years in jail, was awarded \$4500 compensation, or a mere \$450 a year. Guilty Longo served only six years of a 12-year sentence, then was released on parole!



Anxious to prove himself a provident father-in-law, gray-haired, well-spoken Hubert Lindsey, of Linden, Ohio, wrecked a passenger train, thereby killing three people and injuring a hundred—purely to discredit his railroader son-in-law's superior, and thus get the kid a better job! For reasons known only to jurors, his twelve peers—while judging him guilty of murder—recommended a life sentence. And the police entered a brand new item in their little black book on murder motives!

Reducing Specialist Says:  
**LOSE WEIGHT**

Where  
It  
Shows  
Most

**REDUCE**

MOST ANY  
PART OF  
THE  
BODY WITH

UNDERWRITERS  
LABORATORY  
APPROVED

## Spot Reducer

Relaxing • Soothing  
Penetrating Massage

ELECTRIC  
Spot  
Reducer



PLUG IN—  
GRASP  
HANDLE  
AND  
APPLY

Take pounds off—keep slim and trim with Spot Reducer! Remarkable new invention which uses one of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and turkish baths—MASSAGE!

## TAKE OFF EXCESS WEIGHT!

Don't Stay FAT—You Can Lose  
POUNDS and INCHES SAFELY

Without Risking  
HEALTH

LIKE a magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" obeys your every wish. Most any part of your body where it is loose and flabby, wherever you have extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful, slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results quick, sure and harmless. No exercise or strict diets. No steambaths, drugs or laxatives.

With the SPOT REDUCER you can now enjoy the benefits of RELAXING, SOOTHING massage in the privacy of your own home! Simple to use—just plug in, grasp handle and apply over most any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, neck, thighs, arms, buttocks, etc. The relaxing, soothing massage breaks down FATTY TISSUES, tones the muscles and flesh, and the increased awakened blood circulation carries away waste fat—helps you regain and keep a firmer and more GRACEFUL FIGURE!

### Your Own Private Masseur at Home

When you use the Spot Reducer, it's almost like having your own private masseur at home. It's fun reducing this way! It not only helps you reduce and keep slim—but also aids in the relief of those types of aches and pains—and tired nerves that can be helped by massage! The Spot Reducer is handsomely made of light weight aluminum and rubber and truly a beautiful invention you will be thankful you own. AC 110 volts. Underwriters Laboratory approved.

## TRY THE SPOT REDUCER 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME!

Mail this coupon with only \$1 for your Spot Reducer on approval. Pay postman \$8.95 plus delivery—or send \$9.95 (full price) and we ship postage prepaid. Use it for ten days in your own home. Then if not delighted return Spot Reducer for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You have nothing to lose—except ugly, embarrassing, undesirable pounds of FAT. MAIL COUPON now!

### ALSO USE IT FOR ACHEs AND PAINS



CAN'T SLEEP



MUSCULAR ACHEs:

Relax with electric Spot Reducer. See how soothing its gentle massage can be. Helps you sleep when massage can be of benefit.

### LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

USED BY EXPERTS  
Thousands have lost weight this way—in hips, abdomen, legs, arms, necks, buttocks, etc. The same method used by stage, screen and radio personalities and leading reducing salons. The Spot Reducer can be used in your spare time, in the privacy of your own room.

ORDER IT TODAY

SENT ON APPROVAL—MAIL COUPON NOW!

SPOT REDUCER CO., Dept. B-456  
318 Market St., Newark, New Jersey

Please send me the Spot Reducer for 10 days trial period. I enclose \$1. Upon arrival I will pay postman only \$8.95 plus postage and handling. If not delighted I may return SPOT REDUCER within 10 days for prompt refund of full purchase price.

I enclose \$12.98. Send DeLuxe Model.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

**SAVE POSTAGE** — Check here if you enclose \$9.95 with coupon. We pay all postage and handling charges. Same money back guarantee applies.  I enclose \$12.98. Send DeLuxe Model.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

MAIL THIS 10 DAY FREE TRIAL COUPON NOW!





# THE BLONDE DIES TWICE!

*Thrilling Murder Novelette*

By **FRANCIS K. ALLAN**



When his first wife came back from the grave to make a shambles of his life and new marriage, Eddie figured he had a perfect right to send her right back where she came from!

"Yes," Eddie said, "think of what happens to guys who get caught using crooked dice. . . ."

IT WAS six o'clock in Manhattan when Eddie Barton left his office and headed toward Third Avenue. It was a warm June evening, lush and coatless. It was Friday, payday, and he was meeting Peggy at Donovan's Bar. They'd have a couple of martinis, then take the El down to Proveni's where you could still get a steak for two-fifty and a bottle of wine for one-forty, and the music was free if you played it yourself.

Peggy was waiting at the bar when he walked in. Her hair was short and black—



black as a cat in a storm. Her eyes were dark blue, her nose was uptilted, and her figure was trim and curved.

"Know something?" He leaned over her shoulder. "I love you even when you work crossword puzzles in bed."

"Prove it. Buy me a drink." Then she smiled and leaned against him. He wanted to kiss her and she wanted him to. It was in their eyes as they looked at each other, like a secret they were whispering in this noisy crowded bar.

Then Peggy said, "Oh, surprise. Your cousin Helen blew in from Chicago this afternoon."

"Helen? What Hel—"

"Standing right behind you," Peggy said. "She wants a drink, too."

Eddie turned around and looked. The sounds in the bar fell away. He felt as if he'd been hit. He held onto the bar, and the girl smiled at him. "Hello, Eddie, darling," she said.

It was Helen, yes. But not any cousin of his. It was Helen, his first wife. Helen, who was dead; who had been drowned when Nick Bond's boat exploded and sank, eighteen months ago. It was Helen, his dead wife who wasn't dead. And that didn't make sense. No, that didn't make sense at all, he was thinking. He was married to Peggy. He—

"Aren't you going to kiss me, Eddie?" Helen teased. Then she put her hands to his cheek and drew him down. Her lips brushed his. "Wipe that look off your face," she whispered in his ear. "Be careful." Then she straightened. "I want a Scotch, Eddie. And Aunt Annie said to give you her love."

"Oh," he said. "Yes."

"What's the matter, Eddie?" Peggy said.

"Matter? Oh. Nothing," he said quickly. "I only—Mac, bring us two Martinis and a Scotch and water."

When they came, he drank his fast. Reality came filtering back to him. Peggy and Helen were talking. Peggy had never been

to Chicago, she was saying. Someday you and Eddie will have to come see us, Helen said.

Eddie stared at her in the mirror behind the bar. Her hair was pale gold. Her eyes were gray. Her face was pretty, her figure full beneath her sweater. But the freshness that had once been hers was gone. She looked hard and tired and her eager, hungry mouth showed disappointment. Her clothes were worn, which wasn't par for Helen. Money or no, in the old days she'd worn good clothes.

Their eyes met in the mirror. What he saw in her eyes was a shadow of memory. The memory of those days when they'd lived in the two-and-a-half room flat on Amsterdam; when meatloaf had been a banquet; when their love had been a swift wild storm . . . until the storm had blown itself out. Eddie was remembering Nick Bond and the Emerald Bar on Broadway. He was remembering those last months when all the love was gone, and between him and Helen there had been nothing but the cold fury of hate. And as he looked at her in the mirror, he saw that she was remembering, too. She smiled, and there was the same old hatred in her smile.

"Another, Mac," he said, pushing out his empty glass. Suddenly Eddie was afraid of what Helen would do. He was afraid of what she wanted. *I am still married to her*, he thought. *Peggy is only*. . . . He didn't finish it.

He stared at Helen in the mirror again. *I hate her*, he was thinking. *I was glad when I heard she'd been killed. I wish she were dead. I want to—*

Helen was smiling at him again, reading his thoughts almost. Her eyes dared him, taunted him. She leaned against him. "We used to have wonderful times, didn't we?"

**T**HEY took the El down to Provoni's. Helen wanted another drink, then another. She played the piano and sang. That was the way they'd met Nick Bond. They'd

wandered into the Emerald Bar and Helen had played the piano, late one night. Nick had listened; he'd owned part of a dice game upstairs. Helen had teased him, leaning toward him as she played.

That had been the beginning. Two years ago that was. He remembered it as he sat here, feeling the Martinis build up inside him. He wondered if Nick had actually drowned, or if that part, too, had been a phony.

"Eddie?" Peggy reached across the table and touched his hand. Her blue eyes were troubled. "Something's wrong. Can't you tell me, please?"

Could he? The blonde at the piano, see? My wife. Yes. So I'm sorry to tell you, darling, but . . . His hand closed hard on hers. "I've got a headache, that's all," he said. "Don't worry. I love you." He had never meant it more.

*I will kill Helen, he was thinking, before I let her hurt Peggy.*

The thought came to him quietly, almost peacefully as he sat there—a tall man with sandy hair and brown eyes, with a bony face that people barely noticed at first, then found themselves remembering. *I will kill Helen because I love Peggy;* he told himself. Then he began to laugh.

"Eddie, what— Stop it, Eddie," Peggy said. "That sounds terrible."

He stopped abruptly. He trembled and felt hot. It crossed his mind that he was drunker than he'd ever been in his life. Helen had come back to the table.

"Eddie's got too much on his mind. He should quit thinking so much," she said. There was a cold edge of warning beneath her taunting words.

It was after midnight when they left Proveni's and caught a cab to go home.

"I'm staying at the Sultan Hotel," Helen said.

It was just west of Times Square. When the cab stopped in front, Helen patted Eddie's hand. "Look, Eddie," she said, "I have lots of things to tell you. Why don't

we let Peggy wander along home? She's tired, I think."

"Oh, it's so late," Peggy began. "Wouldn't tomorrow be just as—"

"Darling, you're not afraid for Eddie to come up to his cousin's hotel room, are you?" Helen asked.

"If I were, I wouldn't have married him," Peggy said coldly. "I—"

"It's all right," Eddie said in a haggard voice. "I won't be long, Peggy." He got out, then he turned back and Peggy's dark blue eyes searched his until it hurt.

"Eddie?" she whispered. "You're sure you don't want to tell me something?"

He pulled his eyes from hers before she saw too much. "There's nothing to tell. Go home and go to sleep. I'll see you in the morning." Then he turned back toward Helen. They walked through the narrow shabby lobby, and she got her key from the sunken-mouthed clerk. The elevator man pushed his paper aside and took them up to the sixth floor. She unlocked the door into a bare stale-scented room. The door closed:

"Cozy," she said. She sat down and pushed off her shoes. "So I'm not dead. So it breaks your heart, doesn't it, Eddie?" she said. "Phone down and tell the man to send us a couple of drinks from the bar." She smiled. She was drunk. "It's almost like a second honeymoon, Eddie. Why don't you kiss me, darling?"

Eddie just stood there, looking at her; at her legs where her dress had slipped up, at her breasts and her lips; and remembering the first night he'd held her in his arms. It seemed like a long time ago.

"What the hell are you staring at?" Helen said angrily.

He didn't answer. He picked up the phone and ordered two drinks. "Now," he said, slamming the receiver down. "Tell me in plain words. What do you want? What are you after?"

She smiled. "Money, natch. A girl needs money."

HE FELT the bills in his pocket. Two weeks salary. A little less than two hundred. Four different debts crying for every buck in the roll. "How much? And what happens then?" he asked.

"Three thousand, and I'll kiss you a big good-bye."

"You're crazy!" Eddie exploded. "I couldn't raise three thou—" He stopped as the elevator man brought the drinks. Eddie paid him and closed the door. "Three thousand is something I can't get."

"You're lying. You've got it or you can borrow it," she retorted. "Know those signs in the subways? If you're regularly employed, we'll lend you up to three thousand on your signature alone. Remember? Well, you can sign your name, can't you?"

Eddie felt his throat closing and getting hot. He opened and closed his fingers. "Yes. And it would take me years to pay it back. By that time you'd be back again. Four thousand next time. Five and— Go straight to hell, damn you!" he raged. "You and Nick Bond! What was that phony drowning deal you two pulled? Where have you been the last eighteen months?"

"Wouldn't you love to know?" She took her drink in one swallow. "Lover Boy. Isn't Peggy going to feel cute, when she finds out she'd been living with you like a tramp? That lady-like look may get a little dirtied-up when the newspapers start—"

Eddie's palm cracked across her cheek as he slapped her. She stumbled back against the wall. Her eyes blazed. She rubbed her knuckles across her lips. "You— You damned two-bit saint," she said huskily. "You sweated along like every other hard-working jerk, so now you've got dimes in every pocket, and to hell with what happens around the corner. You—" She sobbed.

For a moment—one moment only—Eddie felt a strange and fumbling pity for her. The road she had picked had ended, and

the music she'd played was gone suddenly. Then she shattered his moment of pity.

"I hate you, Eddie," she said. "You knew that; didn't you? But you never really guessed how much. You know why I married you? For love? Don't be funny! I thought you were going places, that one day you'd be somebody. I found out how wrong I was, but I was married to you by then. Laugh, Lover Boy." Her eyes hardened. "When do I get the three grand?"

"Never," he said very softly. He couldn't take his eyes from her throat. His mind kept repeating, *I hate her. I want to kill her.*

"Okay," she said, "let's go wake Peggy up and tell her to pack her bags. I'm living there now." She smiled and reached for the doorknob.

It was the smile, in a sense, that was the last straw. But behind the smile were the Martinis, the hate, the rage and the love and the fear, *and Peggy*.

"No," he said. "No, Helen."

"So I get the three grand?"

"Not that, either." His ears were ringing softly. The room seemed to be rushing into a small oval that was nothing but Helen's face. Then his hands reached into the oval and stretched toward her. Her lips parted. She screamed as Eddie's fingers closed on her throat. She kicked and hit at him. Eddie stumbled and swayed, and they fell together.

*I've got to stop. I mustn't kill her,* Eddie thought chaotically. *Killing is murder. I must stop!*

He staggered to his feet. Helen lay there, stunned by the fall, staring at him with a sort of numbed and helpless terror. He retreated, and the room seemed to revolve and the Martinis burned his throat and he couldn't think. Then some inner tension cracked inside his head. The room swam wildly and Helen screamed as Eddie's mind blacked out.

When the blackout faded, he lay beside her. His fingers held her throat. Her sweat-

er was torn, her skirt twisted. Her mouth was open and she was dead. The vacant fixity of her eyes told him that.

He stood up and felt sick at his stomach. He looked at her legs. Once her legs had been lovely to him. Perhaps that was why, even now, he knelt down and straightened her skirt.

His head ached violently, as if he'd struck it in falling. The room tilted and he held to a chair. *I killed her*, he thought. *I tried to stop, but I couldn't. I wanted to kill her too much to stop. Nothing can change it now. She's dead.*

It was two-thirty. The elevator clattered in the shaft. Panic swept over him as he listened to the sounds in the building. He had to get out of there—now, fast—before somebody came and found him.

He opened the door. The corridor was empty. The elevator was silent, now. He went down the stairs. As he crossed the lobby, the elevator man lowered his newspaper and looked at him dully, then went back to his reading.

The night air was muggy. East of Times Square Eddie caught a cab. The converted brownstone where he lived on Fourteenth Street was just as he had left it at seven this morning. Peggy had left the lamp on in the living room. It was a worn, comfortable room. Only the television set was new. They'd given it to each other for Christmas. This room, too, was just as he'd left it this morning. Nothing was changed but himself.

He stopped at the door of the bedroom, then turned back. He felt dirty, too dirty to lie beside Peggy tonight. He got a blanket from the closet and went back to the couch in the living room.

*I've got to think*, he told himself doggedly. *They'll find her. They'll hunt for me and find me. What will I say when they find me? What will I tell them when . . .*

He couldn't make his brain work. His head throbbed. *At the last minute I almost stopped, remember? If I hadn't drunk that*

*last drink, I could have stopped. I didn't really want to kill her. Did I?*

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Hunt

WHEN he woke up, sunlight stretched across the rug. Children's voices rose from the street. His mouth tasted old and thick. Today was different, he thought numinously. It was not like any other day. Why?

Then he remembered: *I am a murderer now.*

At last he sat up. He found a note on the coffee table.

Gone to supermarket, fruit store, etc. Back later. Coffee on back of stove, aspirin in medicine chest. Happy hangover.

Peggy

It was almost three o'clock. Time had lost its shape to Eddie. It was Saturday. And Helen was dead today. Heavy footsteps came up the stairs. He stopped breathing until they passed on toward the third floor. Perspiration covered his face. He got up and turned on the radio to get a news report, then he poured a cup of coffee. As the radio warmed up, a baseball broadcast boomed into the room: the Dodgers versus the Cardinals, and the crowds were yelling. All over the world people are going their ways, Eddie thought queerly. *But where am I going?*

What do murderers *do*, he kept wondering. Not the pros, the gangsters. Him, his kind of murderer. The salesman, the hundred-a-week and help-with-the-dishes guy. Does he keep selling, laughing, kissing his wife, washing the dishes . . . just like nothing had happened?

Then he heard the swift clicking of high heels on the stairs. He had heard them, waited for them too many times not to know. *Now. Now, what can I say? What can I do?*

Then the door opened. Peggy closed it behind her and leaned back. Her cheeks were flushed, her curly black hair disheveled. She had been running. Her blue eyes were almost black.

"Eddie," she breathed, so softly he could barely hear. *She knows*, he thought. "Eddie, Eddie."

"What?" His voice sounded hollow.

"In the shoeshop. I was waiting in the shoeshop. The newspaper. . ." Then she came toward him, holding the crumpled newspaper in her hand. He saw the headline:

#### BLONDE STRANGLED IN MIDTOWN HOTEL

There was a photo of the shabby room, and an arrow pointing to a sheet-covered figure. Eddie took the paper and read the brief story below the photo.

According to the account, an attractive blonde of about twenty-five had been strangled to death in her room at the Sultan Hotel, just west of Times Square. The dead girl had registered at the hotel that morning, Friday, under the name of Helen Jones. Shortly after midnight she had returned with a man. They had gone to her room, ordered cocktails. The elevator operator reported that they were quarreling loudly when he took the drinks up to the room. After two in the morning, the elevator operator noticed the man leaving the hotel alone. The body was found by the maid. Contents of the dead girl's overnight bag had yielded no clue as to where she might have come from. Police were seeking the girl's midnight visitor, described as tall, sandy-haired, about thirty, wearing a gray gabardine suit and blue polka-dot tie.

Eddie looked at his twisted tie; at the gray suit, crumpled where he'd slept in it. At last he looked up at Peggy.

"Tell me. Tell me, Eddie," she begged. "Is it— Was she—"

"Yes, it's Helen. And I killed her."

"Eddie. . ." She sobbed. "But why? Tell me why!"

"I tried to stop. At the last minute, but I couldn't. I blacked out, then she was dead. Like it says in stories, everything went blank and—"

"But why, why?" She dropped to her knees by his chair and shook his arms. "Don't sit there, Eddie, tell me why you did."

"She wasn't my cousin. She was my wife. That's the Helen she was."

"Oh. Oh, but—but—" Peggy stammered.

"But she didn't drown. I don't know the truth about that. She wanted three thousand dollars, or she was going to make a mess about us. Three thousand wouldn't have stopped her. She'd have come back. She—"

"Oh, but Eddie, you didn't need to ki—" She caught herself.

"I know it, but last night in that room with her was different. I hated her so damn much. I was drunk. Then when she smiled that last time, something cracked and I— But I tried to stop myself. I couldn't," he repeated uselessly. "She said something about you, and then—"

"Yes. Yes, I know," Peggy said softly. She put her head in his lap and her arms around his waist. "I didn't mean to say what I said. I— Eddie, kiss me." She raised her head. "Don't look like that. Kiss me."

"No."

"I love you. Kiss me," she whispered. "Believe me, I love you."

Then she was in his arms, and his throat hurt, and he felt the tears on her cheeks—or were they his tears? Then they were quiet in each other's arms, as he stroked her curly black hair.

"They mustn't find you," she whispered. His arms grew tighter about her.

"They mustn't! Say it back to me, Eddie," she begged. "They won't!"

"They won't. It's such a big city." But his voice was empty.

"We'll leave New York, Eddie," she

said swiftly. "Now, tomorrow, quickly. We'll go to California or anywhere. There's no law that says we've got to stay here. We'll go so far they'll never find us."

Now it was *us*, not him. They were together. He wasn't alone. Even when he killed, she was with him.

"I'll tell the landlord tomorrow," Peggy went on breathlessly. "Let me do it. You stay in these rooms. I'll do everything. We'll say you're sick, and that's why we're leaving so suddenly. I'll get the tickets and all those things. We'll catch a bus. Nobody pays attention to people getting on busses. Oh, Eddie, say something. Say yes. Say it!"

Her confidence caught him up and hope raced through him. "Yes. Yes, Peggy," he said. "Let's go to California. San Francisco. I always wanted to go there, anyway."

"So did I!" She stood up, flushed, her eyes bright. "I'll have to make lists of everything I need to— Oh, Eddie!" She laughed—a quick and forced laugh. "I forgot the damned groceries. I left them in the shoeshop. I'll be right back. Stay here. Don't go anywhere." She closed the door, and her footsteps clicked down the stairs.

EDDIE walked around the room, restlessly rattling the coins in his pocket. Money? They'd have enough to get settled in San Francisco. His job? Hell, he could sell anything, anywhere. A job was only a job. Only the desk clerk and the elevator man had seen him. The odds against those guys meeting him in California was a million to zero.

"I saw the landlord downstairs," Peggy said when she came back. "He's got a waiting-list, so he doesn't care when we move. And I asked Mr. Kovac if he'd send us some empty carton boxes to pack things in. What we'll do, Eddie, is put things in storage, then we can send for them when we're settled."

"I'll have to go to the office one more time and settle my account. I'll do that Monday morning," Eddie said.

Dinner that night was like a strange celebration. Peggy had bought a steak. She tried hard to make things light and amusing, to turn this into an exciting adventure. One thing she wanted in California—a bulldog. The biggest ugliest bulldog in the world. And a bikini bathing suit, natch.

But while they were drinking coffee, silence came. Then Peggy said slowly, "Eddie, tell me about her. You never told me much."

"I went into a music shop on Forty-Second Street one day. She worked there, selling records, sometimes playing sheet music on the piano for customers. She was pretty and exciting. I wasn't making enough to buy beer in those days; she didn't seem to care. We got married in a hurry," he said. He stopped, remembering the reason why she'd married him so fast.

"We lived in a flat up on Amsterdam. It wasn't long before things started turning sour. Sometimes it was money, sometimes I was tired at night and she wasn't. Most of all, we just didn't care about the same things. Helen wanted a party every night.

"Then, one night, we'd been to a movie. On the way home, we stopped in a place called the Emerald Bar on Broadway, up above Ninety-Sixth. It was a flashy joint with a piano. Helen started playing. That was the night she met Nick Bond. I never told you about him, either," Eddie said.

"Do you want to, Eddie?" she asked.  
"It doesn't matter now." He took a cigarette out of the pack, then rolled it back across the table. "Nick liked her and she liked him. He owned part of a dice game upstairs. Later I found out he did a bookie and numbers business, as well. He looked sort of . . . well, like a movie gangster, a little. Or maybe he just tried to. He had money to spend. After that first night, Helen wanted to go down to the Emerald every night. We had fights about it, then she started going alone. The company started sending me out on the road about then, and that suited Helen fine. Toward the

end, nobody was kidding nobody. I don't know why we didn't bust it up a hundred times. We hated each other. Once she went away and was gone two weeks. When she came back, she had a suntan. She said she'd been to Florida. She came back on a Saturday night, I remember. We had our biggest fight that night. I said I was through, and she said that was the best news a girl could get. We stayed in the flat that night. The next morning, Sunday, she went off with Nick to take a ride in a boat he'd bought. I was packing my stuff that afternoon when I got a call from the Coast Guard out at Blink Harbor on Long Island. Nick's boat had exploded and sunk, they said. They'd found Helen's purse, tangled up with some debris and floating. There were scraps of her clothes and Nick's, but they never found the bodies. And that was the end of it until last night when I looked at her in Donovan's Bar."

"Eddie, didn't she tell you anything about why? The explosion on the boat, and pretending to be dead all this time?"

He shook his head. "I asked her. She laughed at me."

Peggy frowned. "They had a reason. They must have had a reason," she said. "I'll bet Nick Bond didn't die, either."

After dinner they began packing books and china into the carton boxes. But the pretense of excited adventure had died. They worked quietly, and sometimes Eddie forgot and sat there, dully, trying to remember what all this was about. Why were they packing, moving? Then he remembered again.

The next morning, Sunday, it was raining. Peggy went out and bought the paper. There was nothing new in the case of the Strangled Beauty, as the papers were calling it now. The police were still hunting for the midnight visitor. They had been unable to learn anything more about the dead girl. It was now suspected that Helen Jones had not been her true name.

By Sunday night everything was packed.

Early in the morning Peggy would call the moving and storage company, and Eddie would go to the office to settle his accounts. By tomorrow night they would be on their way to California.

Monday morning, as Eddie rode the subway toward Grand Central Station, it came to him that this was the last time. And he realized how much he loved this crowded town, its noisy subways, its dirt and loneliness.

At the office he opened Dave Peyton's door. Dave glanced up. "What the hell, haven't they arrested you yet?" he said.

**E**DDIE felt the floor sliding out from under him. *He knows. The police have already been here,* he thought. "What? What?" he was saying blankly.

"The Sinister Midnight Visitor," Dave said. "The Mystery Killer in the Strangled Beauty Case." He grinned. "Come on, Mac, break down and sing. The game is up. Everybody in the office knows you're the torpedo." Then Dave began to laugh. Eddie felt his cheeks burning hot and cold. Vivian, the receptionist, passed by in the corridor and snickered.

"Hi, Gorilla," she said.

Then Eddie began to realize it was some kind of a nightmarish gag. He tried to grin. "Sure. Big joke, but what're you talking about?" he said.

"Playing innocent, huh? Can't remember. Got an alibi, too, I guess. We'll see—" Then he began to laugh like crazy. "Hell, you even look guilty, you dumb ox!" The joke was getting bigger and bigger. Eddie felt the walls squeezing in on him. It was hard to breathe. Dave's sharp terrier face seemed to sniff at him, yap at him. Dave was loving this, and his bright black eyes danced.

"What's so damned funny?" Eddie exploded.

"You, if you could see yourself." Dave got up and strutted over. He wanted to play some more. "It says the killer was wearing

a gray gabardine suit, polka dot tie. What we're wanting to know around the Deluxe Air-Conditioning Corporation is this, Mac: Where did you burn the murder clothes? Come on. What goes with that polka dot job you were wearing at lunch last Friday? And something else. The dame was named Helen. Once, says the office boy, our hero was married to a Helen. Maybe a mystery, huh? So we're wanting to know the—" He stopped. "My God, you're sweating."

"Why can't I sweat?" Eddie said. "Is something wrong with sweating?" His voice echoed harshly in the small office, startling him with the nakedness of its panic.

Dave Peyton's laughter vanished. He blinked several times. "It was a gag. Don't get sore."

"Sorry." Eddie tried desperately to smooth his voice. "I—I don't feel like gags today. I'm sick."

"You look it. What's the matter?"

"I'm quitting, Dave. I—I'm sorry it's so fast, but I've got to get out of New York." Suddenly that sounded wrong. "I've got to move to a different climate, I mean. I'm quitting today."

Dave sat down at his desk. "What's the matter?" he said. "Where're you going?"

"Florida. Maybe Texas. I—" Eddie was trying to think, but Dave's eyes kept him off balance. "I went to a doctor. I've got tuberculosis."

"Aw, Eddie. I'm sorry as hell." Dave's face softened. "My sister had it. It's no party. What does the doctor say? You got it in both sides?"

Eddie knew nothing about tuberculosis. It was only a name he'd picked out of thin air. "Yes," he said quickly. "Both sides."

"How long does the doctor think it'll take?"

Eddie had the feeling that he was being pushed into a corner. "He didn't— A couple of months, anyway. Maybe longer. He wouldn't—"

"A couple of months! The crazy fool. A

couple of years would—" Dave stopped and the sharp terrier expression crossed his face again. "What doctor have you got? I got to know a bunch of them when my sister had it."

"His name—Smith. George Smith. What difference does it make to you? I'm the guy that's sick, not you: All I want to do is get an okay on my account," Eddie said furiously.

"Don't get so edgy, Eddie. I'm only asking because I know how it. . . ." Dave's words faded. For moments—for ages, it seemed—he stared at Eddie, and Eddie felt something going wrong. He could almost feel Dave thinking, testing one word against another. Dave was a clever psychologist, and he wasn't a sales manager because he had rocks in his head.

"Eddie," he said, gently as a hymn, "when the doctor x-rayed you, did he do it from the front or back?"

"He. . . ." Eddie swallowed. He wanted to run. He wanted to slug Dave and run. "Both ways," he said slowly. "He wanted to be sure."

Dave started to say something, then changed his mind. "Okay, Eddie, get your order-file and we'll check you out."

The answer had been wrong, Eddie realized. Dave knew he was lying. Will he add the rest together? The next hour was agony. He submitted his final orders-approved and his expense account. Dave okayed everything without a word of argument, which wasn't like Dave. Then he wrote out the check and sent it up to Smathers for signature. That took another twenty minutes. Eddie felt Dave watching him. *I should have just walked out*, he thought. But that would have looked suspicious, wouldn't it?

The check came down at last. "Eddie," Dave said, "good luck. You ought to be going to Saranac, not Florida or Texas. But," he added with a curious note of irony, "it's your problem, isn't it?"

And as Eddie closed the door behind

him, he knew that one minute from now Dave would be hunting the phone directory for a doctor named George Smith. And after that? An hour from now Dave would be on his way to the police. For curiosity. To look at the corpse of the Strangled Beauty. Dave was that kind: the kind who would stay up until three in the morning to work a chess problem. Nothing personal; just a puzzle to Dave, an answer he had to discover. And he would recognize Helen's body. She had been to the office Christmas party. A couple of times she had come up to the office.

It would be so simple. As the elevator took him down, Eddie wondered why he'd ever dreamed that the California thing might work. There wasn't a prayer; there never had been a prayer.

*But it had to work.* It must work. To lose Peggy would be worse than dying, he thought in panic. They had to get away. But every moment was vital now. Tonight would be too late.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Eddie Holds the Dice

WHEN the elevator stopped, he hurried across the lobby toward a phone booth in the drug store. He called Peggy. "Peggy? Listen. We can't wait, Peggy. Dave has a hunch."

"The movers promised to be here by noon. They—"

"We can't wait," he broke in. "We'll just have to kiss the stuff good-bye. Dave damn near knows already. He—" Eddie stopped. "Peggy, you're not in this yet. You can always stop and say I never told you—"

"Don't be dumb," she said almost angrily, then her voice softened. "What do you want me to do, Eddie?"

"Get out suitcases and clear out of there. We—I'll meet you at Grand Central Station. But take the cab to Pennsy and

change. When you get to Grand Central, buy tickets to St. Louis. Later we'll mix it up from there. I'll meet you in the waiting room."

"Yes, Eddie," she said swiftly. "Don't worry. We'll make it."

Eddie hurried toward the bank at Radio City. He cashed the check and closed out his account. When he left the bank, he had seven hundred and eighty-two dollars in his pocket. A drizzle of rain had begun to fall and the cabs—as usual in the rain—were full. The rain was light, so he walked to Grand Central.

He bought a paper in the waiting room and sat down in a far corner where he could see Peggy when she came in. Thirty minutes passed, then he saw her come in and sit down. She was carrying her light overnight bag and his bigger suitcase. She looked tired and troubled, but she smiled quickly as he went to her.

"They're in my purse—the tickets," she said. "The train doesn't leave for three hours."

"Let's put the luggage in a lock box and get a drink," he said. "You know, bon voyage to New York." But that wasn't funny.

They started toward the lock boxes.

"Don't hurry, Eddie," said a vaguely familiar voice. He turned. "Hello, Eddie," said the man.

It was Nick Bond, but changes had taken place. A long reddish scar stretched across his forehead. His face was thin; it wore a look of flight and tension. His clothes were shabby. Gray was in his black hair, and his eyes had turned cold and harsh. "Don't hurry," he repeated. "You're not leaving yet. I know you killed her."

Eddie tried desperately to bluff. "Killed who? I don't know—" He pushed it harder. "Bond! I thought you were dead! They said—"

Nick laughed without humor. "Save it, Eddie. She tried to get three grand out of you, and you killed her instead. She told

me what she was going to do, and where—at the Sultan. Do I need somebody to draw me a picture? I can read the papers." He nodded toward the Forty-Second Street exit. "Let's go. You, too," he added to Peggy.

Peggy's face was pale. She looked at Nick, then at Eddie and her lips trembled. Eddie's fingers tightened and his fist ached.

"Don't," Nick said. "Whatever you're thinking, don't. Because I've got a .32 in my pocket."

So close. Almost, Eddie thought as they moved toward the door. Just three more hours and they might have made it.

They took a cab to Third Avenue and Eighty-Sixth Street, then walked up to Eighty-Seventh. East on Eighty-Seventh Nick stopped at a dirty brown building: *Katherine Residence Hotel, Furnished Rooms with Kitchenette, Weekly Rates, Vacancy.*

The hallway smelled of stale food-odors. The automatic elevator shuddered and rattled. Nick unlocked a door on the fifth floor. It was a large unkept room with a bath and an in-the-wall kitchen. Newspapers lay on the floor. The sink overflowed with dirty dishes. A bottle of rye and a glass stood on the table. The fold-out bed was open and unmade. And the room was filled with a jasmine scent that Eddie remembered instantly: it was the perfume Helen had always used.

NICK was watching him stonily. "Just three lousy grand, and you killed her," he said. "Then you laughed, didn't you? Okay, laugh some more." He picked up a red hat and threw it at Eddie. "Maybe you'd like to know: she bought it the day you killed her. She never got a chance to wear it. Laugh at the little red hat, Eddie," he said savagely.

"I didn't laugh at her," Eddie said. "I was sorry, but it was too late."

"Too bad." He poured a swallow of rye and drank it. He coughed. Then he looked

at Peggy: at her legs, her lips, and the curves of her breasts. "So you were moving this little romance out of town. Go somewhere, get a new name, forget it like you'd forget a cat you ran over on the road. Like that . . ." His eyes burned at Eddie. "Okay, and to hell with you. She's dead, and you can't bring her back. But you're going to do a little job for me before you go, so I'll feel better about forgetting."

"What? What job?" Eddie asked.

"Shooting dice."

"I don't get it. Why—"

"You'll get it. Fifteen grand you'll get tonight. From Ben Saxon. Remember Saxon, my old partner at the dice game upstairs at the Emerald? He's opened up again. He'll remember you."

Eddie remembered Saxon: a huge and totally bald man, with thick glasses and a mournful face.

"How much money did you get at the bank?" Nick asked abruptly.

For long moments Eddie stood there. Without the money they couldn't go anywhere. The money was life, breath and blood. Without it—

Nick's hand came out of his pocket, and Eddie stiffened as he saw the short shiny revolver. "How much? Put it on the table for me to see," Nick said.

"Let him have it, Eddie," Peggy said. "It's only money."

Slowly Eddie emptied his pocket onto the table. "Seven hundred and eighty-two," he said. His throat was dry and the words sounded thick.

"It'll be enough," Nick said. "Take it back. I just wanted to see it. Now I'll show you something." He took out a pair of dice. "From Mexico City. Nice dice," he said. "They'll hit double-five till hell sings. You'll make a lot of points tonight, Eddie. At least fifteen grand." He laughed shortly. "Catch," and he tossed the dice to Eddie.

Then Eddie understood. "You're crazy, Nick! Ben Saxon is too smart—"

"So are the dice. So are you. You've got to be, see?" Nick said ironically.

"But he'll know something's sour! Fifteen thousand—"

"People have won that much before at that same table."

"But not half-dollar shooters like me. Ben will know it's phony. I'm no gambler. The only time I even—"

"You're a gambler tonight," Nick said flatly. "You started gambling when you killed Helen. You're working to even your bets with me tonight."

"Nick, listen, please," Peggy said frantically. "Take the money, all of it, and gamble with it yourself."

"But I'm dead, baby, remember?" he said. "Think of the questions they'd ask if I wandered in."

"Yes," Eddie said harshly, "and think of what happens to guys who get caught using crooked dice. That's another point, isn't it?"

Nick smiled. "Don't get caught, Eddie." His smile faded and his eyes were hungry and hunted again. "Anyway, I'm not asking. I'm telling. You're going to drop these dice into that game tonight, and you're going to come home with a bundle. And you're going to come home alone; without telling anybody about me, without stopping at a hockshop to buy a gun. Why are you going to be so nice about those things? Because me and the .32 are going to be sitting here with your wife." His eyes glowed. "Of course," he said softly, "you can always take the money and run."

Eddie's eyes met Peggy's. Did she wonder? Was there a shadow of doubt in her mind? But her dark blue eyes answered his question beyond any need of words. He wanted to take her in his arms and promise that somehow, someday, he would make all of this up to her.

But he knew in his heart it could never be made up, really. The scars of this would always be there—if they lived to see them.

Nick poured another drink of rye. Some-

where in the building a baby was crying. A radio played. The rain stopped. Eddie and Peggy sat close beside each other on the bed, and her hand came over to his.

At last night came. "You can get started now," Nick said. Eddie was almost glad. The afternoon had been an agony of waiting and watching. Nick and the gun. He stood up and Nick picked up the gun. "Remember. At least fifteen grand," Nick said. "And remember who'll get shot first if you try to double-cross me."

"I'll remember," Eddie said. He turned toward Peggy.

"Oh, Eddie. . . ." she whispered. Then she kissed him, and her arms were tight about his neck. "Someday, Eddie, everything will—" She didn't finish, but he understood what she'd meant to say. He turned quickly. Then he was in the hall, and Nick was locking the door behind him. He heard Peggy sob.

"Have a drink, baby," Nick said. "We've got lots of time."

Eddie went down the stairs. The night was warm and foggy. On Eighty-Sixth Street he bought a newspaper. There was nothing new on the Strangled Beauty case. Maybe Dave Peyton hadn't gone to the morgue, after all. Maybe Dave had believed his story about tuberculosis.

But in his heart Eddie knew he was only kidding himself. Dave had gone, or he would go tonight. Now or soon the police would know. Maybe they already knew, and hadn't told the reporters.

**A**T NINE O'CLOCK, for the first time in eighteen months, Eddie walked into the Emerald Bar. The piano was exactly where it had been, the last time Helen had played it. And Ben Saxon was sitting at his accustomed table eating spaghetti. He saw Eddie and blinked rapidly behind his thick glasses.

"Hello, Eddie," he said. "How've you been?"

"Not bad." Eddie lowered his voice. "Is the game still running?"

"Not like it was. Sit down. Have a drink, Eddie?" And Eddie said he'd have a Martini. "It's a heavy game, Eddie. You wouldn't want it."

"I'd like to take a swing at it. I've made some good commissions lately."

Ben smiled, and he looked like a leathery frog. "Save it, kid. You'll need it someday." His smile faded. "I haven't seen you since Nick's boat blew up. Too bad about Helen."

"Yes." Eddie picked up his Martini. "I've married again."

"Or maybe it wasn't too bad." Their eyes met. "I've always wondered about that boat explosion," Ben said quietly. "After it happened, I found out that the kitty upstairs was short eighty thousand dollars. It went only one place—Nick." He blinked at Eddie. "I almost tried to find you once to tell you something. I can tell you now, if you're interested."

"What was it, Ben?"

"About a year ago a friend of mine was in Mexico City. A gambler down there was having a hell of a hot streak with the dice. My friend saw him once. He swears it was Nick. A blonde was with him named Helen."

"Oh," said Eddie. Then he tried to make it better. "The hell it—"

"I'm only saying what I heard. The end of the story goes like this: Whoever it was, Nick or no, they stopped the dice on him one night and found they were crooked. The next morning the police found our boy in an alley with a piece of his head mashed in and his bankroll gone. I don't know whether he died or not, or what happened to the blonde. I've had fun wondering. But I'll tell you something, if you don't mind, Eddie," he said quietly. "You didn't lose anything you weren't better off without when you lost Helen."

"No," Eddie said. "I know that." But Eddie's fingers were touching the dice in

his pocket. Nick had tried it in Mexico and lost. *In an alley with his head mashed in.* Now he was sending somebody else, while he sat in a room with a .32 and Peggy.

"What's the matter, Eddie?" Ben Saxon asked. "You look bad."

"Matter? Oh. Nothing," Eddie said jerkily. "I just—I had flu last month, and it keeps hanging on. I'm all right." He ordered another Martini. His stomach felt hollow and tight, his skin hot and dry.

Then a strange thought crossed Eddie's mind: *It was a big help to Nick, in a way, when I killed Helen. Wasn't it? He needed somebody to run the risk. He—*

Ben Saxon rose. "I've got to be getting upstairs. Take it easy, kid."

"But I— Wait, Ben, I—" He thought of the ugly scar across Nick's head; he thought of some unknown alley in Mexico. But then he thought of the shabby room on Eighty-Seventh Street, and the .32. *And Peggy.*

*He'll kill her,* Eddie thought. *He's desperate. He needs money. I've got to shoot dice for him. . . .* Then again it crossed Eddie's frantic mind: *It's all so neat. Like a neat little plan. I killed her when it helped him most, when he needed me most.*

Then he remembered Peggy's dark blue eyes. "I've got to shoot dice tonight, Ben. I—I mean, I've been itching to for months," he said frantically. "I can stand it. Five, six, seven hundred dollars won't hurt me tonight."

"You're sure?" Ben asked slowly. Behind the thick glasses he was blinking again, and his eyes were puzzled. Already, Eddie sensed, he had done it wrong. He had made Ben curious, suspicious.

"Okay, Eddie. You made it, you spend it," he said. "Come on." They went up the narrow stairs beyond the man's room and into the dice room.

There was a bar in one corner. A dozen men were playing at the table, and a few others were sitting around with drinks. Eddie bought three hundred dollars worth of

chips. Ben Saxon stood beside him a few minutes. Eddie lost twenty dollars when he missed a five. Ben wandered away.

Eddie touched the dice in his pocket with sweating fingers. Not yet. This was too soon, he thought.

His thoughts flicked back to Nick and Helen. *Nick's broke. So their romance was over. A busted scar-faced gambler wasn't for Helen. She was leaving him and Nick knew it, didn't he? Maybe he hated her by then. He wanted something to happen to her. She could have talked too much; about him being alive, about his crooked dice.*

The dice came back to Eddie, and he lost another twenty. Next time, he promised himself. He must hurry. He thought of the shabby room, of the .32 and Peggy. He must do it, get it over with, and hurry back.

Ben Saxon was talking to a man at the bar. Eddie eased the dice out of his pocket. When the dice came back to him, he rattled them hard, then let one fall to the floor. He scooped it up. It was done in a moment—the trade of the dice from one hand to the other—and he threw Nick's dice across the green felt-covered table. Up came the two fives. Eddie took the odds and caught the two fives again on the third roll. He lucked through an eight, caught the ten again, and made it for five hundred dollars. Before he fell off, he'd made a nine and come back to make a third ten. When the hand was over, he was trembling and the chips were heaped in front of him.

He went over to the bar for a straight rye, then went into the men's room and threw Ben's dice out the window.

"The dice are getting hot for a change," a man was saying when Eddie returned. Eddie put two hundred on the line when a little man with a flushed face shot. Ten, again. Eddie was taking the odds every time. The little man made the ten, then an eleven. The men left their chairs and came over to watch. Saxon stopped behind Eddie.

Finally the dice came back to Eddie. He was sweating and he felt Saxon's eyes on his neck. Get it fast and get out before Saxon catches on, he told himself frantically. He pushed five hundred on the line.

"Feel something coming, Eddie?" Saxon said.

"Tonight is my night." Eddie tried to laugh. "I've got a hunch."

**H**E THREW and a ten settled. He took the odds and caught a ten on the second roll for fifteen hundred profit. Again he shot five hundred. He made a four and then came back to a ten and made it.

"Good hunch, Eddie," Saxon said gently.

Eddie couldn't remember how much he'd won. The chips were in a wild heap before him. Then a tall gray-haired man came up to the table. A newspaper was folded under his arm. Eddie was shaking the dice when he glimpsed the picture in the paper.

His picture! The photo that Peggy had kept on her dresser. There it was, for the whole dice game to see. And above it were the words:

#### SOUGHT IN SLAYING

So Dave had been to the morgue, identified the body, and now the police knew whom they were hunting.

"You're still shooting." The stickman pushed the dice at Eddie.

"I—I'm cashing in," Eddie stammered. He knew that he had to get out of here now, and fast. He couldn't wait to win fifteen thousand.

"You don't want to finish your hand?" Ben said.

"I can't. I—I haven't got time. Cash me out," Eddie said.

Ben's eyes, behind the thick glasses, were curious and probing. Eddie was afraid to meet his eyes. He glimpsed the newspaper again. Why didn't the man stick it in his pocket?

Eddie fought the impulse to run. He had to wait for the cash-out. He couldn't go back to Nick without any money.

"Hurry, Ben," he said raggedly. "I tell you, I've got to go."

"Sure. Okay." But Ben kept looking at him, thinking, making up his mind about something. Then he stacked and counted the chips. "Five thousand, three hundred," he said. "A big night, Eddie. You win these, too." He picked up the dice. "Let's go in the office."

Eddie swallowed and his throat was dry. He followed Ben along a hall to a small room with a desk, a phone, and a few straight chairs. Ben rolled the dice across the desk. "Ten," he said. He rolled again. "Six . . . ten . . . four . . . five . . . ten . . . ten. . . . Lots of fat tens. What's the matter, Eddie? You look like a plate of cold gravy."

"Nothing's the matter," Eddie said. The light shone on Ben's huge bald head and it glistened against the thick lens of his glasses. He kept rolling the dice gently—not looking at what he rolled; looking at Eddie's face as the dice clattered and danced across the desk top.

"Nervous, Eddie?" he murmured. "Feel bad?"

Eddie opened his mouth. Nothing came out. He knows. He knows, Eddie realized.

"Eddie," Ben said softly, "about these dice. There's an old rule that says, 'When you get caught—'"

"Ben!" Eddie said harshly. Ben was slowly opening the desk drawer. "Ben, listen! They're not mine. They're Nick's dice! He made me do it."

"What?" Ben's head jerked up. "Where is Nick? When did—"

It was the only chance Eddie had—that instant of surprise. He smashed a right into Ben's jaw. Ben staggered backward and his glasses sailed across the room. Eddie slugged him again, and Ben fell.

Eddie listened for sounds in the hall. His heart was pounding. *I mustn't run*, he told himself.

He knelt and felt into Ben's pockets. He found a fat roll of bills. Four thousand,

five— Over five thousand, he counted quickly. He thrust the roll in his pocket. Then he saw the short revolver in the desk drawer, and beside it a lean, long pocket knife.

He touched the gun, thinking of Nick, of the room and the .32 and Peggy. But if he failed. . . . He remembered what Nick had said: *Remember who'll get shot first if you try to double-cross me*. Eddie pushed the gun back in the drawer. He was afraid to risk Peggy's life against the chance. But the knife? So thin. Easier to conceal. Maybe—

Ben groaned. Eddie snatched the knife and shoved it in his pocket. He stepped into the hall and closed the door. Just as he started toward the stairs, the door from the dice room opened and the stickman came into the shadowy hall.

"Hey, Ben," he said excitedly. "You know something! That guy that just won the money is wanted for—" Then he got a better look. "Hey! You—" Eddie raced down the stairs and through the Emerald Bar. He ran down Broadway to Ninety-Sixth. When he turned the corner, he hauled himself down to a walk. On Amsterdam he caught a cab.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Look Behind You

HE GOT out at Third Avenue and Eighty-Sixth and turned toward Nick's hotel. At the door to Nick's room, he stopped and took out the knife. The blade was sharp. He stood on one foot and wedged the blade between the leather and the rubber sections of the heel of his shoe. The handle-part stuck forward along the sole. He put his foot down. It made him half-an-inch taller on that side, but he could walk on it, and Nick probably wouldn't notice.

He knocked. After a few moments Nick said, "Yes?"

"It's Eddie. I'm alone."

"You better be." The key turned. The door opened and they stood there together—Peggy, her face tired and pale; and Nick, with the gun against Peggy's ribs, his eyes hot and bloodshot and wary.

"Against the wall," Nick said. His voice was thick and he smelled of rye. He locked the door, then he searched Eddie, never moving the gun from Peggy's ribs. There wouldn't have been a prayer of hiding Ben's gun, Eddie realized. Nick did everything but look in his ears. But he *didn't* look at the soles of Eddie's shoes. He threw the money on the table.

"Okay," he said. "You get a medal for being so good." He retreated to the table and looked at the money again. "This isn't fifteen thousand!" he exploded.

"I couldn't get fifteen. I—"

"The hell you couldn't!" Nick said savagely. "What couldn't you?" You're holding out! Where's the rest of—"

"There's not any more! That's all, I tell you. I was lucky to get that," Eddie said. "Every paper in town has my picture on it—wanted for murder! A guy walked into the dice game and practically threw a paper on the dice table. I had to slug Saxon and steal what I got! I—"

"I don't believe it! How come they got the answer so easy? Seven million people in town, and bingo, they guess exactly—"

"A man at my office had a hunch! He remembered the clothes I—"

"A hunch, a hunch!" Nick was beside himself with fury. "A guy had a hunch, so now you're hot! Very sweet! So who's going to shoot dice for me in Jersey and Chicago and St. Louis?"

"Oh," Eddie said. Suddenly he understood. It wasn't to have been just once; just Ben's game. But twenty, fifty games, with the murder-axe hanging over his head, and the crooked dice winking at him and—

"Five lousy grand!" Nick raged. He picked the money up and slammed it back on the table. "Chicken-feed! It wasn't

worth the work and trouble," he said bitterly.

"The work and trouble," Eddie echoed. "Did you go to a lot of work and trouble, Nick?"

"Getting the dice. Figuring it. You know what I mean," Nick snapped.

"Was that all the work and trouble you went to?"

"What do you mean?" Nick asked hotly.

"You had a long dice-shooting tour planned."

"You think I was going to live forever on fifteen grand?"

"Didn't you go to a *lot* of work and trouble, Nick?" Eddie persisted.

Nick leaned across the table. "Just what the hell are you getting at?" A sharp and searching brightness shot through his eyes. Eddie knew he should stop. Nick was drunk, enraged. The least thing could blow him up. But Eddie couldn't stop. Something too wild and incredible for hoping raced through his mind, as he stared into Nick's eyes.

"You didn't love Helen. She didn't love you any more," Eddie said. "To her, you were just a scar-faced and busted gambler, and she was through with you. Wasn't she? And so you hated her!"

"Did I?" The .32 was in Nick's right hand. He poured a shot of whiskey with his left.

"And you were afraid of her," Eddie went on. "You know she was going to put the bite on me, but she wouldn't get much. She'd need more money soon. Where would she go? Maybe to Ben Saxon! To tell him that the boat explosion had been rigged, that you weren't dead, and she could show him where to find the man who cheated him out of eighty thousand dollars. That's why you were afraid of her, wasn't it?"

"Was it?" Nick's eyes were dark and chocolate colored. The room was so quiet that Eddie could hear Peggy's shallow breathing. Again he knew he should stop. But he couldn't, and it was too late to quit.

"So it was nice that she got murdered," Eddie said. "It was double-nice when you got a fall-guy for your crooked dice act in the same package. It was so nice," Eddie said, "that it makes you wonder. Didn't you go to a lot of work and trouble to make it be so nice, Nick?"

Nick ran his tongue over his lip. "What kind of work? he said softly. "You're telling this, so tell me."

And now Eddie sensed he had come to the innermost door. His throat felt cool and tight as he watched Nick. His heart pounded. The wild incredible hope pulled him on. He leaned forward, trying to loosen the knife with the toe of his left shoe.

"In that room at the Sultan, Nick, where Helen was killed," he said. "That's where you did your real work."

Nick said nothing.

"There was a closet in that room," Eddie said. "It was behind me, I remember." He paused, and there was sweat on Nick's upper lip. "You knew she was going to bring me to that room to talk money. You hid in the closet, didn't you, Nick? But things worked out even better than you'd hoped. You'd planned to kill her after I left and frame me for—"

"Oh, Eddie, Eddie!" Peggy burst out in breathless realization. "You didn't—"

"Shut up!" Nick raged. His face was flushed. The gun shook in his hand. He wet his lip again, then the red faded to gray on his face as he stared at Eddie. "Keep telling. I'm listening. I just don't like hysterical women." The gun was still shaking in his hand.

Eddie swallowed. The room seemed to grow smaller, until it was only a cubby-hole dominated by the gun in Nick's nervous hand.

But another part of him, even amid his fear, soared joyously as the wild incredible hoping became true. *I didn't kill her. I tried to stop, and I did stop*, he thought. *I am not a murderer. I am Eddie Barton, salesman. Stop.*

"You were going to kill her and frame it on me," he went on slowly. "But it worked out better than you'd ever dreamed. I was drunk, damn drunk. I almost strangled her. I stopped. I stepped back. Then you slugged me and finished the job."

**T**HÉ pulse beat slowly in Nick's throat. Somewhere in the building the baby was crying again. "Did I, Eddie?" Then Nick almost smiled. "Or as they say, So what? You've got some nice answers, but *I've* got the gun. Sometimes, you know, the right answers can cause you a lot of trouble. Just like tonight."

"No, Nick," he said.

"What do you mean, 'No, Nick'? You can't prove a thing. You'll never get a chance to prove it."

"Won't I?" Eddie said it quietly—a million times more calmly than he felt.

Eddie laughed. It was the hardest laugh he'd ever dredged up in his life. For a moment his eyes met Peggy's; she knew he wasn't laughing really.

Then Eddie laughed again, in Nick's face this time. "You fool! Do you think I figured all this out while I was sitting here staring at that .32? Don't be crazy! I knew who killed Helen when I walked out of this room to go to the dice game."

Nick's eyes flared and brightened. "You're lying. You're bluffing," he said hotly.

"Want to bet?" Eddie said. He leaned forward. "I was drunk that night, Nick, but not as drunk as you thought. I heard a脚步声 behind me. I knew I didn't kill her and pass out." *I knew I got slugged. The only thing I didn't know was—who did it. Then, when you danced in with your made-to-order dice deal, I had all the answers. And I had the answers when I walked out of here. That's the kicker, Nick.*"

"So what?" Nick leaned across the table. He was breathing hard and fast.

"So I didn't go to Ben Saxon's dice

game. I went to the police, Nick," he said very softly. "And I brought them back with me. The whole thing has been a trap, Nick."

"You're lying," Nick whispered thickly. "You—this money! Where—"

"From the police. Part of the trap," Eddie said. He had stopped breathing. It was going to be now, he knew.

"Damn little good the police will do you, as long as this gun—" Nick began.

Eddie laughed. "Stop kidding yourself." He bent forward a little more, and his hand touched the rug near his shoe. "How crazy do you think I am? I didn't walk back into this room to get killed. I figured that out with the cops. Nobody's going to get killed except, maybe, you. Why? Because, Nick, they're standing on a hook-and-ladder extension at the window behind you, looking at you with a machine gun. Now," said Eddie, "start laughing, Nick."

IT TOOK an endless second for the words to sink into Nick's brain. He simply stood there, his mouth open, his face wet and gray. Then he flung himself around to face the window. He fired at the window in a reflex of terror. The glass shattered.

In that same instant, Eddie gripped the knife and leaped.

"Down, Peggy! Fall down!" he shouted. He was within four feet of Nick when Nick twisted to face him. Nick fired again wildly, then the gap was closed between them and Eddie carved an arc through the air. It ended as the blade sliced across Nick's wrist, hung against the bones, then slid away to leave a spurting gash.

The gun fell from the shocked fingers and Eddie kicked it across the room. Then Nick gave a hoarse horrified scream as he stared at his wrist. Eddie snatched up the gun. Nick made a lunge for the door. Eddie slugged him and he fell across the bed, leaving a trail of blood. He grabbed at his wrist, trying to shut off the blood. Then

he began to scream in the shrill tones of a woman.

"I'm bleeding to death! I'm bleeding to death! Stop it, make it stop!" he screamed.

Footsteps pounded on the stairs, and voices tangled in the corridor. "Let them in, Peggy," Eddie said.

She unlocked the door, and people crowded into the doorway.

Eddie hauled Nick erect and shoved him into a chair. "You can bleed to death, Nick, or I'll stop it. I'll stop it when you start talking."

Nick kept screaming.

Eddie tore a strand off the sheet to make a tourniquet. More people pressed into the doorway, but no one came any closer when they saw the gun in Eddie's hand.

"When you start telling, Nick," he said, "I'll stop the blood. You better hurry."

Nick stopped screaming. Their eyes met, then Nick began to blubber. And then he began to talk. "I killed her...."

\* \* \*

Dawn was showing over Brooklyn when they left Headquarters, and took a cab home. The streets were wet and clean. For some reason they didn't talk.

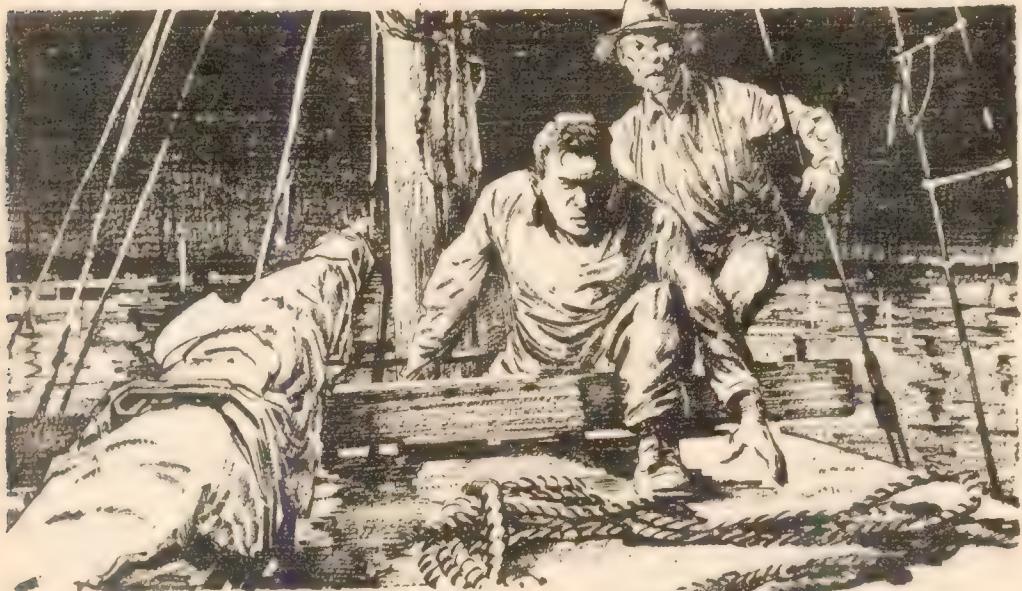
They climbed the stairs to their apartment. Peggy took out her key, then paused. "Oh, Eddie," she said, "maybe it's not ours any more. The landlord might have rented it today."

Eddie rang the bell a long time. "Let's try it," he said. They went in. Here were their things, packed, waiting. Probably the movers had come and gone away, not knowing what to do. Eddie looked around him with a strange feeling. The stuff was old, worn. Only the television set was new. But it was part of their life. And somehow, seeing it stacked this way, Eddie felt a foolish affection for it.

Then he and Peggy looked at each other. She said nothing. She simply held out her arms. Her eyes were dark and there were tears in them. Then she was in his arms.

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# THE DEADLY NIGHT



By

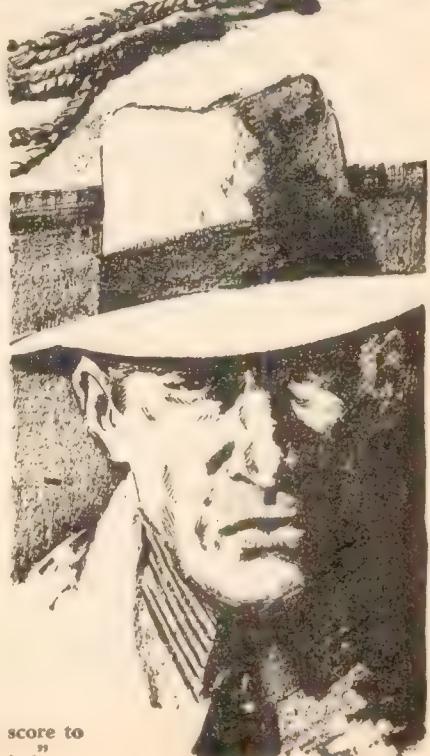
**JOHANAS L. BOUMA**

With his gimpy leg, Johnny couldn't run away fast enough . . . So when Judy got into a jam, the only thing he could do was to charge straight into danger!

**J**OHNNY JORDAN was leaning on the railing of the old wooden fishing barge, thinking of Judy and Alaska, when he saw the launch cut water to come alongside.

"Police launch," Old Ben said. The leathery skin around his eyes wrinkled in a squint. "Wonder what they want here?"

Johnny frowned. He was a big dark young man, and he walked with a limp to the head of



Johnny said, "I've got a score to settle with Tony. . . ."

the gangway. And he was remembering Judy's tragic face, the obvious fright she had tried so hard to hide last night.

A thick man in a brown sports coat and tan slacks stepped from the launch to the gangway platform, followed by three uniformed policemen. As they came up the steps, fishermen crowded the rail and looked on with puzzled faces.

Johnny and Ben were waiting when the thick man stepped on deck. He looked at them both with impersonal gray eyes and extended a cupped hand. Johnny saw the gleam of a gold badge.

"Lieutenant Harper," the man said. He looked at Ben. "You're Ben Benson. Own this scow, right?"

"Ain't no scow," Ben said gruffly. "Cargo vessel. Three-master. I've sailed her—"

"Yeah," Harper said. "Feed that stuff to your customers, Benson. I know all about you." He looked at Johnny. "You Jordan?"

"That's right."

"Okay." Harper glanced around the deck. He turned to the cops. "Check the customers, Jack. Bill, you and Max go below and search every inch of this old tub."

"You can't do that—" Ben began weakly.

Harper took a paper from his pocket. "Search warrant. Look at it. Is there a place here we can talk?"

"Our cabin," Johnny said.

They went below. The cabin was not large. Harper sat down on one of the bunks and looked around. "You two live here, is that right?"

Johnny nodded, his eyes wary. "What's this all about?"

"A young woman named Judy Carson. When did you see her last?"

"Why do you want to know?"

Harper rubbed his jaw, his gray eyes narrowed. He said softly, "I asked you a question, Jordan. You want to answer it here or at headquarters?"

"It's all the same to me," Johnny said. "I don't know why you're asking about Judy, but whatever it is she hasn't done anything."

Harper smiled faintly. "Love." He paused. "Just maybe you can do her more good by telling me when you last saw her, then by keeping your mouth shut."

Johnny didn't say anything. He looked at Harper for a long moment. "Last night," he said finally. "She stayed for supper. I took her back to the wharf around eight o'clock."

"Thursday. She always come here on Thursdays?"

"That's right."

"Yeah," Harper said, and rose. "You two stay here. Don't budge." He went out, closing the cabin door behind him.

BEN said uneasily, "What they want Judy for, you think?"

"How the hell would I know?"

"I hope there ain't no trouble. If they close us down—"

Johnny closed his ears to the rest of Ben's complaint. Sure she'd come here on Thursdays, always on Thursdays, and he would see her here. A slender girl with a lovely pale face, with blue-black hair that shone like a blackbird's wings. A girl with a haunting sadness about her, and a low weary voice that entered his heart.

She'd come out on the ten o'clock boat, and he was always there. It was part of his job to help the passengers up the gangway. Elderly people, mostly. They loved the old barge that lay solid as an island in Surf City's bay. They enjoyed leaning on the rail and looking down on the blue water, not minding if they got only a couple of strikes the whole day long.

That's why he was surprised to see her come again and again. Not to fish, either. Not really. He learned that the first time she came out. She rented a pole from Ben. Then she came to where he stood by the big bait tank. He scooped a half dozen

wriggling sardines into a pail of water for her and watched the way she walked to the bow, the way her dark slacks fit, the grace of her. He saw right away that she was hesitant about baiting up, so he limped over to her.

"Can I help you, Miss?"

She turned as he came up, and glanced instinctively at his legs. He had never gotten used to the artificial limb. The original was buried somewhere in Korea, and he feared at times that more of him was buried there. This was one of those times, and a dark flush spread across his lean cheeks.

"Can you show me how to put one of these—fish on the hook?"

He showed her. He showed her how to cast. She tried hard to appear interested, but he sensed she wasn't. The glow that most of them had at wetting a line was missing. She was there, was all. The fishing didn't mean a thing.

She caught the last boat back, and he watched her all that time, looking toward the distant shore, the city's skyline, the warehouse and docks.

*Like she hasn't a friend in the world,* he told himself.

Old Ben noticed her too. Ben was always on the lookout for new ears to plague with his stories. He was a gnarled stub of a man, a weak but pleasant character whose imaginary deeds were known all along the waterfront.

Johnny knew Ben was a liar. But he never cracked a smile listening to tales of typhoons in the Yellow Sea, brawls in Singapore, whaling expeditions, to all manner of adventure Ben had supposedly shared.

The first time Johnny mentioned Alaska, Ben broke in, saying, "I been there a good many times. Fairbanks, Yukon country, Nome—know 'em like I know the palm of my hand—" He glanced quickly and slyly at Johnny. "You ain't ever been there, have you?"

"No, but I always wanted to go," Johnny said vaguely. "Ever since I was a kid.

A man can still homestead there. I knew a guy that tried it after the last war. He finally made it, and now he wouldn't leave for anything in the world."

"Fine country," Ben said. "Now there was one time there along the Yukon that I'm gonna tell you about—"

Johnny, half listening to Ben's tale, knew there was no use kidding himself. He'd never see Alaska. It took a whole man to work that country. This barge was his retreat, his Ivory Tower, just as much as it was Ben's. *Give me a few more years and I'll be just like him. Then I'll be telling about the Alaska I've never seen.*

He learned the girl's name. She worked on the hill, she said. Huge estates covered the hill overlooking the bay. A maid she was, for Mrs. Purtell. Johnny had heard of the Purtells, had seen their pictures in the society pages. Purtell was big in shipping, in imports and exports. His wife was an avid social worker. "I guess you can see the barge from their place," he said to Judy.

She smiled. "It looks like a walnut shell from there."

He looked forward to Thursdays. Just knowing she would be there would give him purpose. One day she laughed going up the gangway because a sudden gust of wind swept her hair in front of her face, and she looked at him, still laughing.

Maybe it was the way he looked back at her. For suddenly she stopped laughing, and shook her head slightly.

"Keep laughing," he said. "Maybe you'll catch a whopper."

She smiled quickly. "I hope so."

She did, too. A big barracuda that gave her a rousing battle. Johnny leaned over the rail with the long gaff, hooked the fish in the side and hauled it in. He grinned at Judy. The glow was there now, all right. It shone in her dark eyes.

"You'll eat good tonight."

"Oh, I don't want it, Johnny. I can't take it up there—"

He said, "Look, this is your day off, isn't it?" She nodded. "Well, how about we bake it here? Ben's a fine cook." He added quickly. "Bakes it in wine sauce—really good eating. You want to?"

"But how would I get back? The last boat leaves at six—"

"I'll run you back in the skiff."

She hesitated, frowning. "Well, I don't know—"

"It's a date," he grinned.

That's when it happened. He started to go down on one knee to wrench the hook from the barracuda's hard mouth with a pair of pliers. Somehow, he lost balance. Falling, the leg of his trousers slid back, exposing the artificial limb. Her stare hit him in the pit of the stomach. Their eyes locked. Then, magically, she was laughing. "At least you can't bruise it."

"One of these days I'm going to throw the damn thing overboard."

"Get a peg leg like Old John Silver. Was he the one?"

He felt his heart thump. "I think so."

The following Thursday she stayed again for supper. Then yesterday. That's when he noticed the difference, the fright beyond the sadness. And how she checked the boat each time it came with another load of fishermen as if she half expected someone she didn't want to meet.

She tried hard to cover the fright, over-eager when he asked her to stay for supper. And on the way to the wharf in the skiff, the outboard motor spluttering across the dark bay, she laughed over the stories Ben had told. "Has he really been to all those places?"

"He makes it up as he goes along."

"He told me you want to go to Alaska."

"That's something I made up." He paused. "What's wrong, Judy?"

"Wrong?"

"You're frightened about something," he said roughly. "I want to help."

"No," she said. "No, don't talk, Johnny. Just let it be."

The skiff bumped the floating dock below the wharf. Judy stepped across. "Thanks, Johnny—"

"Next Thursday?"

"I—don't know. I guess so."

"Come here," he said softly. "Close. I want to kiss you."

"Oh, you're so foolish," she breathed.

"Come here," he said.

She dropped to her knees and they both leaned forward and kissed. She drew back. "Don't dream about this—don't take it to heart."

"Won't you?"

She rose quickly. "I have to go." Her voice was harsh. She hurried up the steps, then stopped. "No I won't," she said, and laughed. "It was fun, though."

**T**HAT was last night. Now Harper came back into the cabin, three scowling cops behind him. They brushed dust and grime from their uniforms. "Nothing down there but empty holds," one of them growled. "When was this scow put out of commission?"

"She carried her last cargo in nineteen-twelve," Ben said. "I bought her in thirty-two. Had her hauled—" He blinked, glanced around. "What the hell you fel-lers been looking for?"

Harper looked at Johnny. "If she happens to contact you, let us know right away. I mean that."

"Why do you want her? What did she do?"

"She did two years in Tehachapi before coming here. She got out on parole. Mrs. Purtell took an interest in her. So last night she repays Mrs. Purtell by walking in with a couple of hoodlums and walking out again with eighty thousand dollars worth of Mrs. Purtell's jewels and a brand-new mink coat."

"I don't believe it—"

Harper shrugged. "Let's get out of here," he said to the cops.

Ben wiped his face with a handkerchief

after they'd gone. "Never would have thought it of her, eh, Johnny?"

Johnny went up on deck. He felt wooden. *Phonies*, he thought. *We're all phonies, running or hiding from something. Ben, me, now Judy.*

He worked hard the rest of the day. Then he looked toward shore and said doggedly, "I won't believe them," and stripped behind what had been the wheelhouse, where now Ben rented poles, sold sandwiches, soft drinks and beer. He washed, shaved, went below and changed to slacks and a sports shirt.

Ben had supper on the table, but Johnny didn't want to eat. "I'm calling on the Purtell's," he said.

It was dark by the time he stepped into the skiff and started the outboard motor. The city was a jagged line of tiny winking lights. Twenty minutes to the old wharf. It seemed he'd never get there. A single bulb glowed at its end, the light turning

the rippling water a dull, lifeless yellow.

**H**E SAW her there, on the small floating dock, and he couldn't believe his eyes. He threw her the line automatically, and she tied up. She sat across from him and said softly, "It's just as if you came for me."

"I was going to visit some people. People that took you in when you got out on parole. Now I should go to the police." His breath trembled in his chest.

"I kept hoping you didn't know. I wanted to be the one to tell you."

"About the two hoodlums?" Her face was pale in the furtive light. "About stealing from the Purtells?"

She rose. "I see you've made up your mind to believe—"

He said harshly, "Sit down! I want to hear your side of it."

"His name is Tony. Tony Czuy. I met him when I was singing in a small club in

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Los Angeles. I was ambitious, Johnny. I thought that being seen in the right places would help further my career."

"How about being seen with the right people?"

"Please, Johnny," she said softly. "Tony took me to those places. I thought he got his money gambling, and I was partly right. We'd go to the races every day—"

"The fat life. Go on, tell me about tomorrow."

"You'll know soon enough. One night I drove Tony and another man to a bar in Beverly Hills. Tony said he had to meet someone there. I parked out front and he told me to wait in the car. I didn't think anything of it, didn't have the faintest notion that they were going to rob the place.

"There was shooting. Tony ran out. He started for the car, but just then another car pulled in front of me to park, and he swerved into an alley because men were running out of the bar after him. Someone had seen Tony and the other man get out of my car, so these men stopped me and called the police."

"What about Tony's partner?"

"The bartender shot him, killed him. The police never caught Tony. I told everything just as it happened at my trial, but they wouldn't believe me. Tony had been suspected of using a woman before on hold-ups, and they said I was the one. I know why Tony did it to me," she continued in a hopeless voice. "He wanted me, and he thought he could have me once I was involved in a robbery."

"Could he have had you—"

"No," she said. "I learned a lot about myself in prison. I'd been dumb, like most of the girls in the place. Wanting things, grabbing for them with eager hands. I wasn't guilty of the charges that sent me up, but I was guilty of being a dumb little fool." She paused, looking up at the stars, then said in a soft voice, "I came out on the barge that first time because it seemed like a small island where I could escape

everything, even my thoughts. And I kept coming back for that very reason."

"Let's get back to last night."

"Believe me, Johnny, I wouldn't do anything to hurt the Purtells. They've been swell to me." She shook her head. "Tony. I'd forgotten him. Then he phoned me yesterday morning before I came out on the barge. He'd learned where I was, and he's been in the city for two weeks checking up on me and the Purtells. He knew about Mrs. Purtell's jewels—"

"Why didn't you call the police?"

"I was going to, but he wouldn't say where he was calling from, and it's a big city. He said the police couldn't touch him on that holdup two years ago because after that long a time the bartender wouldn't be able to identify him. Then he said that if I tried to make trouble for him he'd fix it so that I'd have to go to prison again. I was frightened, Johnny. I didn't know what to do. Then yesterday on the barge I decided to wait until I knew for sure where he was before calling the police."

"What else did he have to say?"

"That he'd contact me again this coming Thursday. But he lied. He and another man were waiting for me at the foot of the wharf last night. They forced me into a car and drove to the Purtells', who were out for the evening. Only the housekeeper was there. They tied and gagged her, and they said enough in front of her to make her think that I was in with them.

"Then they broke into the wall safe. They took all of Mrs. Purtell's jewels, some cash and her mink coat. They weren't in any hurry, either, and just as we drove away from the house the Purtells turned up the driveway. Five minutes later we heard the police alarm on the car radio. They had blocked the coast highway and the inland roads, so Tony decided to stay in an obscure auto court for a few days.

"We went to one and stayed all night and most of today. Just as it got dark, we started to leave, and I took the chance and

got away from them. I called the police from a service station, and then came here."

"Why, Judy?"

"I don't know—I just wanted to look at the lights on the barge, I guess. I hoped that maybe I could see you before going to the police. I wanted to tell you myself, Johnny, not have you get my story second-hand—"

Johnny looked at her. He took both her hands in his. Something rose in him, flowed in his veins. He said huskily, "Listen, Judy, I'm on your side, you hear me? I've got some money saved and I'll get a lawyer, a good one. And if the police catch Tony, maybe they can make him talk." He had never in his life felt so strong. She lowered her head and started to cry. "Baby," he murmured, and held her tight against him.

"Shall we go now, Johnny?"

They stepped from the skiff and started up the steps to the wharf, their arms around each other's waist. Johnny looked up. Two men were standing there.

"I knew it," one of them said. Judy gasped. "Turn right around and go back," the man said.

**T**HHEY stood on the small floating dock. The man who had spoken was slender and darkly handsome in a gray suit. The other man was stocky and broad. Both had guns in their hands.

"Please, Tony, go away," Judy said in a small voice. "Don't do anything—"

"Don't beg!" Johnny said sharply.

Tony laughed softly. "Look at 'em, Al. Their arms around each other."

Al had a small satchel in his left hand. "Damn fool thing coming here," he said gruffly. "We ought to be out on the highway making mileage."

"With every cop in the city looking for us? No, Al, I got a better idea. We're all getting in this skiff and going out to the barge. That's one place the cops will never look." He made a motion with his gun.

"All right, gimpy, get in. You next, sweetheart. Al, you get up front. I'll sit facing them."

Johnny started the outboard motor. His hands trembled with rage. He swung the tiller and the wharf receded behind them.

"This is great," Tony said. "Just smell that salt air, Al. We'll sit out on that barge for three or four days taking it easy."

"People come out there to fish," Al said uneasily.

"So that bothers us? Listen, boy, we'll be parked below in one of the cabins, with our sweetheart here to keep us company." His teeth flashed in a grin. "Gimpy won't say anything because if he does we'll have to hurt her. Will you say anything, gimpy?" He looked at Judy, and now his voice held a cutting edge. "You could've had me and the world. But instead you go soft for a cripple. What gives? You crazy or something?"

Judy's hand tightened on Johnny's. She looked at him and said softly, "Not crazy at all. I love him."

Tony leaned forward and slugged Johnny in the face. "Don't grin, damn you! Just don't grin!"

"Take it easy," Al said uneasily. "They can hear you at City Hall."

"The hell with 'em." Tony sat back, glaring first at Judy, then at Johnny. "Crazy damn fools."

Ben had heard the put-put of the outboard motor and was waiting on the gangway. "Who you got with you—" he began. Then he saw the automatic in Al's hand. "Hey, what is this?"

"Up on deck," Al said. He followed Ben up the gangway. Tony herded Judy and Johnny ahead of him. They went below to the cabin. "I could eat," Al said, tossing the satchel on one of the bunks. "Where's the chow, Pop?"

Ben blinked. He looked at Johnny with frightened eyes. "We got sandwiches, beer—"

"Go with him, Al," said Tony. "Bring

plenty." He looked around. "Well, it ain't the Waldorf, but it'll do." He settled back on a chair and crossed his knees, the automatic hanging from his hand, a half-scornful, half-amused grin on his handsome face. "We'll just sit quiet until Al and the old man get back. Then we'll talk business."

Johnny looked at him, hating him. "Two years," he said. "Two years of Judy's life. How low can a man get?"

Tony shrugged. "I've known women who would've enjoyed taking a rap for me." He grinned at Judy. "Didn't you enjoy it, honey?"

"Don't even answer him, Judy," said Johnny.

Ben came in with a box of sandwiches and bottled beer, Al behind him. "Cheese and ham. What kind you like, Tony?"

"Ham. Open me a beer, will you?" He unwrapped the wax paper from the sandwich and took a bite. "Sit over there and watch 'em while I eat, Al. Now here's the deal, gimpy. You and the old man pay attention. Al, sweetheart and I are gonna stay right here. You'll go about your business during the day like there was no one down here. If there's as much as a hint of trouble, sweetheart gets a bullet right through her beautiful little head, and I ain't kidding." He took another bite and chewed slowly, looking straight at them. "Is that clear? You, Pop, you get what I mean?"

Ben nodded quickly.

"Good. Just don't try passing any messages to the people that come out to fish, because you'll only be putting a bullet in sweetheart over there. Al, get that flashlight on the shelf. We're gonna find a place where these two can spend the night. Pop, you can lead the way with the flash."

**T**HEY went out of the cabin and along the passage to a companionway that led down into a hold. There was a small hatch in one corner of the hold. "Damp down here," Al said. "Just smell that rotting

wood. It's a wonder this old tub floats."

Johnny was holding Judy's hand. Slowly, he released her fingers. He looked at Al's broad back, sensed Tony behind him. He took a deep breath and whirled, reaching blindly for Tony's gun. Something came down out of the darkness against his skull, and he fell forward on his face. Through a thick haze he heard Tony say, "I was expecting that, gimpy. Maybe next time you won't be so smart." He kicked Johnny in the side. "On your feet!"

Johnny rose awkwardly. He felt Judy's hands on him, heard Judy's soft voice. "Are you all right, Johnny?"

"Yeah, he's just fine," Tony said. "Al, take the flashlight. You, Pop, lift that hatch."

An upright ladder led down into a deep and musty hold. Al, on his knees, played the flashlight around in there, saying, "Stinks down there, but it's empty."

"Can you move that ladder?"

Al tried. "Yeah, it's just wedged in there a little, is all."

"Great. We'll put 'em down there at night and haul the ladder out. It's deep enough so they can't reach the hatch, ain't it?"

"Hell yes. Nohing for 'em to climb on, either."

"Made to order. All right, gimpy, you first."

Judy's arms came around Johnny. "Don't worry about me, Johnny—"

"We'll get out of this, baby." He kissed her.

Tony gave him a shove. "Move, damn you!"

Johnny went down, then Ben. Tony called harshly, "Think about Judy with me tonight, gimpy!" His voice reverberated in the hold. Then Al put the hatch in place and they stood in total darkness.

Ben's groping hand touched Johnny. "I can't even see you—" his old voice quivered.

Johnny didn't say anything, listening to the footfalls above them, the germ of an idea in his brain. Just might work. Worth a try, anyway. He said, "Ben, you're going to hold me on your shoulders."

"Never reach the hatch that way."

"Shut up and do as I say." Johnny groped along the wall to the corner. The hatch was directly above them. "Brace yourself here in the corner."

Johnny quickly took his trousers off and gripped Ben's shoulders; put his foot in Ben's cupped hands and raised himself slowly. Ben grunted and sagged a little. Putting his foot on Ben's shoulder, Johnny raised himself again until he was standing straight. He turned a little, leaning into the corner, and carefully unstrapped his artificial limb. Then he reached up with it. "Straighten up a little more, Ben," he said softly.

"I can't—" Ben grunted.

"Straighten up, damn you!"

Balancing himself on his one leg, one hand palm down against the wall, Johnny tried again. The shoe on the artificial limb scraped along the hatch. Johnny pushed upward. The hatch moved an inch. He pushed again and gained another inch. If he could hook the toe of the shoe. . . .

Three feet, maybe. The shoe slipped twice, then held firm. He put a little of his weight on it, and it still held. "Keep straightening up as much as you can," he said softly.

Ben straightened as the artificial limb took more of Johnny's weight. "Now then," Johnny said. "Put your hands under my foot. That's it." He was sweating, and flashes of pain exploded in his head where Tony had hit him with the gun. He clamped his jaws tight together. He got a high hold on the artificial limb with his left hand. "I'm going to take a chance on this thing holding me. Now when I say 'push,' push like hell. If I can get my hand on the edge of that hatch. . . ." He paused, took a deep breath. "Ready, Ben?"

"Ready," Ben grunted, one hand gripping Johnny's ankle, the other the shoe.

"All right." Johnny paused. "Push!"

**H**E THREW himself upward against the wall, Ben pushing, and then the fingers of his right hand were over the edge of the hatch. He hung for the split part of a second, then pulled hard, letting go of the artificial limb with his left hand and moving it up to join his right. Then he pulled himself up until he hooked an elbow over the edge. He rested a second, breathing hard, the hatch leaning on his head and shoulders. He pushed it aside and crawled out the rest of the way. The artificial limb still hung there.

He strapped it quickly to the stump. Then he lowered the ladder and Ben climbed it. He handed Johnny his trousers. "What now?" There was a little eagerness in his old voice. "We can get to the skiff, Johnny. Paddle her away, then start the outboard."

"That's what *you're* going to do," Johnny said. "I've got a score to settle with Tony."

"Then I'm sticking with you," Ben said, an odd stubbornness in his voice.

"Come on, we'll see how things stack up."

They crept softly up the companionway. The door to the cabin was open, putting light in the passage. Ben whispered, "Listen. One of 'em is out on deck."

Johnny heard the scuffing of leather on wood. He tip-toed across the passage to the companionway that led to the deck. *Al*, he thought. He went up the steps, Ben at his heels. Johnny gripped Ben's elbow, nodded his head toward the short broad figure leaning with elbows on the railing. It was Al. They closed in on him at a crouch. He started to turn. "Nice out here—"

Johnny hit him on the side of the jaw, seeing the startled look. Al grunted and sagged a little. His warning yell was

(Continued on page 111)



"... It's a gun. Just move toward the door like we was three pals, or it'll go off."

# STRANGERS IN THE HOUSE!

By RICHARD DEMING

Harry Nolan headed home after work to his beautiful new wife and their brand-new apartment. One hour later, both were gone forever—and everyone was trying to convince Harry they'd never really existed!





HARRY NOLAN slipped his key into the Yale lock, looked surprised when it failed to turn, and raised his eyes to the brass numerals over the door. The numerals were one, three and four, just as they had been when he left for work that morning.

Withdrawing the key, he examined it puzzledly, then tried to fit it into the lock upside down. It refused to enter.

Once more he tried it the right way, but when he had no more success than before, withdrew it and dropped it back in his pocket.

The lock must be broken, he thought, trying to decide what to do about it. He left the shop at four-thirty, while Helen, his wife, worked until five, so it was unlikely she was already home, but he rang the bell on the off-chance she had left work early.

To his surprise, the door was opened by a slim, red-haired woman he had never before seen.

An unprejudiced male would have considered the redhead beautiful, or at the very least pretty. But Harry was in the habit of unconsciously appraising every woman he met by the standard of Helen's fresh sparkle. It took more than surface beauty to match that sparkle; you had to be clean and fresh inside, in love, and sure you were loved in turn. By beauty contest standards the redhead would have surpassed

Helen, but all Harry saw was her brittle hardness.

When she looked at him inquiringly, Harry said with mild bewilderment, "For some reason my key won't fit. Is Helen home?"

The woman looked puzzled.

"I'm Harry Nolan," he explained. "Helen's husband."

"Helen?" the woman said. "I'm afraid I don't understand. There's no Helen Nolan here."

A man outside Harry's range of vision called, "Who is it, honey?"

The redhead called back, "Some man looking for his wife, Kurt. Do we know a Helen Nolan?"

Harry began to grow angry. Who these strangers in his apartment were, he had no idea, but he had no intention of continuing to stand in the hall outside of his own home. He started to push by the woman, then stopped in confusion.

The front room was not that of his apartment. Not only were its furnishings entirely different, but the wallpaper was a flowered pink instead of a vertically striped green.

A tall, dark-skinned man seated on the sofa looked up at Harry with a frown, folded the paper he was reading and rose to his feet.

Harry stammered, "I'm . . . I'm sorry. I thought this was my apartment."

As he backed through the door, the man crossed to stand next to the woman. He continued to frown at Harry, and now the woman was frowning too. Finally the dark-skinned man shrugged and pushed the door closed in Harry's face.

**O**NCE again Harry looked at the numbers over the door. They still read one, three and four. Checking the doors to either side, he found they were 132 and 136, just as they should have been. Immediately across the hall, as usual, was apartment 135.

Just as his bewilderment started to become tinged with an element of panic, Harry saw the light. He was simply in the wrong building; an understandable error, inasmuch as he and Helen had moved in only a week ago, and their apartment house was one of three identical buildings in the same block.

With a relieved but rather embarrassed chuckle at himself, Harry went down the stairs, passed through the front door and studied the gilded number embossed on the glass of the door. Panic jumped within him again when he saw it was 102.

Glancing left, then right, he saw identically solid, red brick apartment houses rising five stories either side of him. Wildly, he turned to study the opposite side of the street. At one end of the block was the same gas station which had been there that morning, at the other end the same drug store. And between them were the same brownstone-front houses which had once been upper middle-class homes, but now were boarding houses.

Harry felt his sanity slipping. Grasping at a straw, he ran to the corner and peered up at the L-shaped street sign. His throat contracted when the sign verified that the corner was Carlton and Fourth.

"Whoa, boy!" Harry told himself. "Let's pull ourself together."

With forced calmness he marshaled facts to convince himself he was not going mad. Last Saturday he and Helen had moved into apartment 134 at 102 Carlton Avenue. It was now Friday, which meant five times he had left apartment 134 at 102 Carlton Avenue to go to work in the morning, and five times had returned after work in the afternoon.

He dismissed the possibility that he had left from and returned to either 100 Carlton or 104 Carlton, for not only was he certain of the address, he was certain it was the center apartment house. With equal certainty he discarded the possibility that his apartment was 34, 234, 334, or

anything but 134. Since he always climbed a single flight of stairs to reach it, it had to be 134.

Glancing at his watch, he saw it was five-fifteen, too late to catch Helen by phone before she left work. Since she would be getting off a bus right where he was standing within another ten minutes, Harry decided to wait for her. The thought that they could tackle the problem together reduced his panic to mere worry.

When Helen failed to alight from the five twenty-five bus, Harry was disappointed. When she was not on the five forty-five, he began to experience unease. When the five fifty-five passed without even slowing down, a cold chill crept along his spine.

Forcing himself to at least surface calmness, he crossed the street to the gas station, located a pay phone on the wall, and then discovered he had no change in his pockets. He extracted a dollar bill from his

wallet—and found that he was all alone.

The station's single attendant was outside gassing a car. Under the stress of his increasing nervousness, it seemed to Harry the man deliberately moved in slow motion when he finally hung up the hose and began wiping the windshield, though actually he was kept waiting no longer than a minute and a half.

When the attendant finally entered the station, Harry thrust the dollar bill at him and asked for change to include some dimes. To his slight annoyance the attendant gave him ten dimes.

Catching his expression, the man said, "Didn't you want to play the machine?"

For a moment Harry was puzzled, but then he noted the dime slot machine in one corner of the room. In Wright City you found slot machines everywhere: In filling stations, drug stores and even in barber shops. And of course in every tavern.

"Phone." Harry said briefly.

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Fishing from his wallet the slip of paper on which Helen had written the unlisted phone number of her boss, he dropped a dime and dialed the number. It rang several times before a woman's voice answered, "Hello." It was not Helen's voice.

"Is this Mr. Dale Thompson's office?" Harry asked.

"Yes. His home and his office." The woman's voice had a dulled edge, as though she had been crying.

"This is Harry Nolan. Is my wife still there?"

"Who?" the woman asked.

"Helen Nolan. Mr. Thompson's secretary."

For a moment there was silence. Then the woman said in a puzzled tone, "I'm afraid I don't understand. You are speaking to Mr. Thompson's secretary. My name is Miss Wentworth."

FOR a long time the constriction in Harry's throat refused to let him speak. Finally he got out, "May I speak to Mr. Thompson, please?"

On the other end of the wire there was a silence nearly as long. Then in a muffled tone the woman said, "I'm sorry. Dale . . . Mr. Thompson had a heart attack this morning. He died at Mercy Hospital at eleven o'clock."

The shock of it flooded over Harry like an icy stream. Not because of any particular feeling for Thompson, for he had never even met the news columnist. But the announcement of his death was like a closing door to Harry, an abrupt cutting off of an avenue of escape from what was gradually assuming the proportions of a nightmare.

He managed to stammer, "I'm awfully sorry to hear that, Miss Wentworth. But you must know my wife, Helen. She has been Mr. Thompson's secretary for the past two weeks."

"I'm afraid I don't even know what you're talking about," the woman said with a note of finality. "I've been Mr. Thomp-

son's secretary for more than a year. And under the circumstances, I am hardly in a mood for practical jokes."

She hung up.

In a daze Harry left the station, crossed the street and entered the building at 102 Carlton for a second time. Resolutely he climbed the stairs, paused in front of apartment 134 and took the Yale key from his pocket.

*Nothing in the past hour has really happened, he told himself. I've been suffering some kind of mental hallucination. Now I will put the key in the lock, open the door and find Helen with dinner ready, beginning to worry about where I have been.*

Sliding the key into the lock, he twisted it so hard it bent slightly. But it would not turn.

He dropped it back in his pocket and rang the bell. The same red-headed woman appeared. When she saw him, she frowned in surprised annoyance, but then she noted the strained paleness of his face and withdrew a step in alarm.

"Pardon me," Harry said in an even tone. "Would you mind telling me how long you've lived in this apartment?"

"Why . . . why going on four months. Why?"

"Thank you," Harry said, and walked away.

THE night desk sergeant said nothing for a few moments after Harry finished talking.

Then he said, "You left out one part."

When Harry only looked puzzled, the desk sergeant said, "The tavern you stopped in on the way home."

Panic was gripping Harry too tightly for there to be any room in his emotional system for anger. He said patiently, "I haven't even had a beer in two days. And it wasn't just the wrong apartment, because I went back to check a second time. Even if it was the wrong place, there's no explanation for this Miss Wentworth where

Helen worked never even hearing of her."

The desk sergeant drummed his fingers, finally shrugged and said in a tone indicating he was merely humoring a taxpayer, "I'll let you talk to somebody in the Detective Bureau."

Lifting his phone, he pushed one of a bank of buttons on its base and asked for a Sergeant Murphree.

"I've got an odd one for you, Joe," he said. "A guy's lost his wife, but it's not just a missing person deal. He claims a whole furnished apartment disappeared along with her."

After a pause he said, "You can get it from the guy. I'll send him up."

"Take the elevator to the fourth floor," he told Harry, after hanging up. "Go left two doors and you'll find one marked *Detective Bureau*. Ask for Sergeant Murphree."

Following directions, Harry reached the door labeled *Detective Bureau* just as it opened and a thin, cold-faced man stepped out into the hall.

Harry said, "Pardon me. I'm looking for Sergeant Murphree."

The man glanced at him without interest. "Why?"

The abrupt question disconcerted Harry. "The man downstairs . . ." his voice stumbled. "On the desk, you know. He sent me."

"To see me? Okay, shoot."

"It's a kind of long story, Sergeant," Harry said hesitantly.

The sergeant looked pained. Rather grudgingly he said, "My office is next door," and moved toward it.

Harry followed, his throat experiencing the now familiar constriction when he saw the door they were entering was labeled *Homicide Squad*. For the first time it occurred to him Helen might be dead.

The room contained approximately a dozen desks arranged in three rows, like in a schoolroom. Only one in the far corner was occupied, and the man seated behind it

laboriously typing with two fingers did not even glance up. Waving Harry to a seat next to a desk near the door, the detective sat behind the desk and said resignedly, "Shoot."

Harry repeated the tale he had told the desk sergeant.

When he finished the detective asked, "What makes you think your wife is dead?"

The question not only startled Harry, it crystallized a host of vague suspicions into a terrible fear. "I . . . I don't think that," he said desperately. "She couldn't be dead, could she?"

"How would I know?" the detective asked without feeling. "But if you don't think she is, why did that damn fool on the desk send you to Homicide?"

Harry shook his head miserably. Then the door jerked open and a bull-necked man in plainclothes peered in at them.

"You the guy with the missing apartment?" he demanded of Harry.

Startled, Harry repeated, "Missing apartment? No . . . missing wife. I mean yes, both of them."

The seated detective looked at the one in the doorway with unmistakable distaste. Then he looked back at Harry.

With a note of exasperation in his voice, he said, "I been wasting my time listening to one of Murphree's cases. I thought you said Murphy."

"When did you learn to think?" the bull-necked man growled. "For ten minutes I been cooling my heels waiting for this guy."

"Tough," the thin man said with deliberate lack of sympathy. To Harry he said, "This guy is Sergeant Joe Murphree of the Detective Bureau. I'm Sergeant Don Murphy of Homicide. Next time get the mush out of your mouth."

"I'm sorry," Harry apologized stumblingly. "I thought . . . I mean, I didn't know—"

"Come on next door," the bull-necked Murphree interrupted irritably.

As they left the office Harry was surprised to see the two detectives exchange glances of profound dislike.

A FEW moments later Harry was repeating his story for the third time. And this time he was gratified to find he was not met with total skepticism. Not that Sergeant Joe Murphree gave the impression he instantly believed the incredible tale, but neither did he give any indication of disbelief. His questions satisfied Harry he at least was reserving judgment until he had done some investigating.

"You say you got married just a week ago?" Murphree asked. "What was your wife's maiden name?"

"Helen Lawson."

"Local girl?"

"No. From Des Moines. We both are. I've been here about six weeks, but she only arrived three weeks ago."

"How'd you happen to move to Wright City?"

"The Ajax people were running a labor-recruitment drive," Harry explained. "They advertised in the Des Moines papers for fit-up men and I applied. They offered fifty cents an hour more than I was making for fit-up work in Des Moines, plus moving expenses, so I grabbed it. After I got settled, I sent for Helen."

"And right away she got a job as secretary to this Dale Thompson?"

"Well, about a week after she arrived. The Midtown Employment Agency sent her to Mr. Thompson. She was a trained secretary, so she didn't have to worry about getting some kind of a job after she moved here."

"Where'd she stay until you got married?" the detective asked.

"I got her a room up the street from mine. Then we looked for an apartment together, and soon as we located one, we got married."

"Let's take a little ride," Sergeant Murphree suggested.

Instead of using a squad car, they went in Murphree's own automobile, which to Harry's surprise turned out to be a sleek Mercury convertible. Somehow, the thought of a policeman riding around in a convertible instead of a plain black sedan struck Harry as odd.

The sergeant's first remark after they climbed into the car struck him as odd, too. Glancing at his watch, Murphree announced it was nearly seven and time to eat.

"Eat?" Harry repeated. "Before we find Helen?"

The bull-necked detective said tolerantly, "Look, kid, according to your story, it's two hours since you walked into your apartment and found everything different. Whatever it is happened to your wife, another half hour isn't going to change things. But another half hour without food would change me. I work from four till midnight, and my suppertime is seven to seven-thirty."

MURPHREE drove to a moderately expensive restaurant a few blocks from Headquarters, where he ordered a complete meal. Though Harry had tasted nothing since noon, he was unable to eat. He ordered a cup of coffee.

In an agony of suspense Harry spent the next half hour watching the big detective leisurely consume his meal. The minute the man finally sipped the last of his coffee and lit a cigarette, Harry grabbed the check and raced for the cashier.

It did not occur to Harry until after they were back in the car that probably there was some regulation forbidding policemen to accept favors from complainants. However, the sergeant made no offer to repay Harry for his dinner, and since Helen was too much on Harry's mind for him to bother over the expenditure of two and a half dollars, he dismissed the thought.

The red-headed woman and her dark-skinned husband still occupied apartment 134 when Harry and the sergeant arrived

at 102 Carlton. After Murphree identified himself as a member of the Detective Bureau, he and Harry were grudgingly invited in.

The sergeant's questioning revealed the couple were Mr. and Mrs. Kurt Arnold, that the redhead was a professional model and the man a bit actor in the theater. They claimed to have occupied the apartment for the past four months and to have slept there every night during that period except for one weekend they were out of town. And that weekend was nearly a month before Harry and his bride moved in.

"What's this all about anyway?" the dark-skinned man asked.

"Nolan here is missing a wife," the detective said vaguely. "Mind if we look around?"

Kurt Arnold and his wife obviously did mind, but they reluctantly gave permission. Puzzled, they followed Harry and the sergeant from room to room as they investigated the whole apartment.

There were only three rooms and a bath to investigate, and except for their layout Harry recognized nothing familiar in any of them. Even the wallpaper was different in every room. It was not until they had again returned to the front room that Harry suddenly recalled an item which might prove, at least to his own satisfaction, that this was the same apartment he had occupied for a week.

"The bathroom window," he said abruptly. "A triangle about an inch across is missing from the left upper corner. You have to raise the shade all the way to see it."

With all three of them behind him, he shade cord and allowed it to fly all the way strode back to the bathroom, pulled the up.

The upper window pane was intact.

Sergeant Joe Murphree made no comment as he and Harry Nolan left the apartment. He simply led the way downstairs and rang the manager's bell.

The apartment manager Harry had never met, as Helen had been the one to locate the apartment and she had also delivered the first month's rent. It therefore did not upset Harry to have the man look at him without recognition, but when he denied all knowledge of any tenants named Mr. and Mrs. Harry Nolan, and verified the Arnold's story of having occupied apartment 134 for the past four months, a feeling of hopelessness settled over him.

Sergeant Murphree's expression indicated he rapidly was losing his objective attitude.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Man Alone

USING the manager's phone, the sergeant checked Mercy Hospital and learned news columnist Dale Thompson had indeed died of a coronary attack at eleven that morning. He then drove Harry over to the Newbold Arms, where the bachelor columnist had lived alone in a seven-room penthouse which comprised both his home and his office. Though it was by now after eight in the evening, they found the woman Harry had talked to over the phone still there.

Dorothy Wentworth was a tall, efficient-looking brunette. In answer to the detective's question she explained she did not live in the penthouse and ordinarily would not have been there after five, but because Thompson's nearest relatives lived in California, there was no one else to take the numerous calls which were coming in as the result of his unexpected death. Dale Thompson had been mildly famous, and already she had received calls from the governor, the mayor, two congressmen and fifteen or twenty other notables who phoned to express condolences. During the ten minutes they spent at the penthouse, two more long distance calls came from friends who had heard the news over the radio.

Dorothy Wentworth could shed no light whatever on the mystery of Helen's disappearance. She said she had been Dale Thompson's secretary for more than a year, had never missed a day's work, and was positive no woman aside from herself had done any secretarial work for the columnist during that period.

On the way down in the elevator Sergeant Murphree said, "Let's see that paper you mentioned with Thompson's telephone number on it."

Digging into his wallet, Harry handed over the paper on which Helen had written the number. After studying it a moment, the detective thrust it into his own wallet.

He asked, "Can you say for certain your wife ever worked for this guy? You ever visit her here during office hours, or call the unlisted number before today?"

Miserably Harry shook his head. "But why would she pretend to have a job she didn't have? What would be the point?"

The elevator emitted them at the ground floor. When they got off, the detective paused for a moment and regarded Harry dubiously.

"Your wife talk much about her work with Thompson?"

"Not about her work," Harry said. "About him some. She said he was a nice guy to work for. But he made it clear to her before she got the job that he wouldn't stand for any leaks whatever from his office. He said that until after it was published, she wasn't to discuss anything at all scheduled to appear in his column, even with me. So she never talked about the stuff she had to type up."

Murphree said ruminatively, "Maybe that was to cover up that she wasn't really working for him at all."

"That's just silly," Harry protested, but in the face of Miss Wentworth's evidence he was conscious that his voice lacked conviction.

For the first time it occurred to him Helen might have deliberately disappeared,

and the thought upset him nearly as much as when he had faced the possibility that she might be dead.

"Where's this rooming house where she stayed before you got married?" Murphree asked.

The rooming house was at Second and Clark. Harry experienced a sinking feeling when the woman who came to the door was not Mrs. Swovboda, who had been landlady when Helen moved out.

He inquired tentatively, "Is Mrs. Swovboda in?"

The woman, a plump, matronly person of middle age, said, "Mrs. Swovboda moved to Florida a week ago, after I bought her out."

Sergeant Murphree showed his badge. "You run this place now, lady?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Johansen is the name, Sergeant."

"You got a register of former guests?"

"Yes, sir. Come in please, and I'll get it."

She showed them into the same plain but comfortably furnished living room where Harry had sat nearly a month ago when he was arranging a room for Helen. From the top drawer of an old-fashioned desk she took the black loose-leafed notebook in which Harry had entered Helen's name, and in which behind the entry Mrs. Swovboda had written the date and \$10.00 paid.

Watching over the sergeant's shoulder as the man slowly turned the pages, Harry was not surprised to learn the entry was no longer there.

Handing the notebook back to Mrs. Johansen, the detective asked without much interest, "Any of your roomers in?"

Before the woman could reply, Harry said in a tired voice, "None of them knew her. Hers was the side room with the separate entrance. When she moved out I remember her remarking that in the two weeks she was here, she never even glimpsed any of the other tenants."

Without looking at Harry, the detective moved toward the door. Just before pass-

ing through it, he thanked the landlady rather gruffly, glanced once at Harry in a set-jawed manner and looked away again.

Outside, he climbed behind the wheel of the convertible, waited until Harry was next to him, and then said grimly, "We'll make one more check."

Driving a block and a half along Clark, he stopped in front of Harry's old rooming house. With no hope whatever Harry followed him up the front steps.

**H**E WAS so surprised when the door was opened by his old landlady, Mrs. Weston, he very nearly grabbed the woman and kissed her. Under ordinary circumstances such a thought would have nauseated him, for not only had he vaguely disliked Mrs. Weston when he roomed at her house, she was sixty, fat and had a mustache. At the moment, however, she looked beautiful to Harry, for at last he could show Sergeant Joe Murphree someone who had actually met Helen and could vouch for her existence.

The woman frowned at Harry and asked, "What's the matter? Lose your key?"

The question took him aback, but he tabled it for the moment in order to introduce Sergeant Murphree. "Tell the sergeant about Helen, Mrs. Weston," he said eagerly. "You remember. The girl I brought here once and told you I was going to marry."

"Helen?" the woman asked in a doubtful tone. "Did you bring a Helen here?" To the sergeant she said, "I got twelve young men, and they're always bringing their girls around for me to meet. Makes it hard to remember."

"Yeah," the bull-necked detective said disgustedly. "This guy lived here until a week ago, did he?"

Mrs. Weston looked surprised. "Until a week ago? He still does."

Harry gazed at her with his mouth open. Sergeant Murphree glared at him, then asked Mrs. Weston in a stiff voice, "Mind

if I look around his room for a minute?"

The landlady looked him over doubtfully, frowned at Harry and then apparently decided to cooperate with the police without asking questions. She led them up a flight of stairs to Harry's old room. Harry gazed at the blank door in dread, almost knowing in advance what was on the other side.

"Gimme that key you claimed was to the apartment," Sergeant Murphree said, holding out his hand.

Numbly, Harry handed it over. It slipped into the lock easily, and when the sergeant turned it, the door opened. Sergeant Murphree stepped aside, laid his hand on Harry's shoulder and gently propelled him into the room first.

Harry felt no shock at what he saw, for by now his nerves were anesthetized to shock. A numbness almost approaching indifference had replaced his emotions, and he felt nothing whatever when he saw his own books on the table by the window, his alarm clock and table model radio on the bedside stand, and through the open door of the closet a rack containing his own neckties.

The thought flickered across his mind that somehow he had slipped back in time. In science-fiction stories he had read of "time faults" through which a person could accidentally slip and find himself suddenly either in the future or the past. He had never heard of such a thing actually happening, and had never regarded time faults as anything but the stuff of fantasy, but how else could he explain what had happened? Perhaps Helen was still safe in Des Moines and they were not even married yet.

He turned to look into Sergeant Murphree's face, finding nothing there but the resigned bitterness of a cop who is long inured to spending much of his time chasing wild geese.

He asked eagerly, "What's the date today?"

The expression on the sergeant's face

caused his eagerness to die. *The man thinks I'm mad*, he thought.

At the same time a matter occurred to him which shattered the time fault theory to dust. Dale Thompson had died that morning, which automatically proved he had not slipped back a few weeks in time, for once dead, the man could hardly come alive again weeks later and hire Helen as his secretary.

*I am mad*, he thought with an odd sense of relief. *I haven't lost Helen because I never had her. I imagined her arrival in Wright City, the apartment, our marriage, everything.*

With the detached sense of standing to one side and hearing another person speak, he heard himself saying, "I guess it was all a mistake, Sergeant. Sorry to have troubled you."

The detective's face had flushed a dark red. He growled, "What you need is a little psychiatric treatment, Bub. You bring another wild story to Headquarters and you'll find yourself in the observation ward at City Hospital!"

He strode out of the room and clumped down the stairs without even saying good-by to Mrs. Weston. The landlady regarded Harry strangely for a moment.

"What's this all about, Mr. Nolan?" she asked finally. "You in some kind of trouble with the police?"

Harry shook his head at her.

"Well, I wouldn't want a roomer in trouble with the police," she said. "I'll have to ask for your room if there's any more of this kind of goings on."

Harry merely gave her a trancelike nod. After the woman left, closing the door behind her, he stood in the center of the room for a long time without moving.

Finally, for want of anything else to do, he undressed and went to bed.

**T**HOUGH he almost immediately fell into an exhausted sleep, Harry did not spend a restful night. A recurrent nightmare of

chasing Helen along labyrinthian corridors while Sergeant Joe Murphree held him back by the coat tails and Mrs. Weston stood on the sidelines laughing uproariously, awoke him time after time.

His periods of wakefulness were more restful than what sleep he got, for then he could lie still with a deliberately blanked mind and think of nothing. Sleep was merely a half-conscious coma in which agonized fears rose from his subconscious to torment him.

At seven in the morning he abruptly awoke from a dream in which Helen, for the hundredth time, had just disappeared down a dim side corridor. Physically he was as exhausted as when he had fallen into bed, but he was startled to find his mental processes suddenly clear.

Last night he had gone to bed convinced he was mad, that his marriage to Helen, their week together in the apartment had been figments of a diseased imagination. This morning he knew with stark clarity he was as sane as any man ever was. And with equal clarity he knew that whatever persons or whatever supernatural forces had created this incredible situation, Helen either was dead or in horrible danger.

While the thought caused a recurrence of all the terrors the numb conviction he was mad had deadened, it also brought relief of another sort. Aside from the natural relief of knowing he was not mentally diseased, for the first time, he faced squarely the problem of Helen's danger and found the courage to fight it.

He started the fight by mentally going over everything that had happened from the moment his key refused to open the apartment door until his trancelike entry into the room where he now lay. Every action of his own, every word spoken by others, he reviewed in detail in an attempt to find some small point he could grip as a start toward an explanation.

He found two, but they floated into his mind so unobtrusively, it was some mo-

ments before he realized their significance. But when he finally did, he leaped from bed in excitement.

The first detail was small, and by itself probably would have escaped his attention.

It consisted merely of his recollection that Mrs. Johansen, the new landlady at the rooming house where Helen had stayed, had addressed the detective as "Sergeant," although he had offered no introduction other than his badge. How had she known his rank, when she gave no indication that she had ever seen him before?

It was the second detail which filled him with overwhelming excitement. From Mrs. Johansen's Sergeant Joe Murphree had driven straight to Mrs. Weston's.

*But he had not asked the address, and at no point during the supposed investigation had Harry given it to him.*

\* \* \*

Sergeant Don Murphy was not pleased to see Harry.

"I start work at four P.M.," he said inhospitably. "You'll find cops on duty at Headquarters."

"Just any cop won't do," Harry told him. "I thought maybe you'd be interested in knowing your police department is crooked."

The thin detective's expression did not change and his body continued to bar the door of his small frame cottage. But his voice lost its inhospitable edge.

Without inflection he asked, "You just find that out? How long you been in Wright City?"

Harry ran his eyes over the front of the cheap but tidy cottage, glanced at the neatly trimmed lawn, which was just large enough to accommodate a single tree, and finally settled on a ten-year-old sedan at the curb. "Your car?" he asked.

Sergeant Murphy stared at him a moment. "Yeah."

"Sergeant Joe Murphree drives a Mercury convertible. "Brand new."

"Yeah," Murphy repeated.

"I'll bet he lives in a bigger home than this, too."

The thin man regarded him expressionlessly. Then he silently pushed the screen door wide.

Though inexpensively furnished, the living room was as neat and attractive as the outside of the house. Just as Harry seated himself in a worn but comfortable armchair, a boy of about two streaked into the room at a tottering run, a sugar cookie firmly grasped in one pudgy hand.

Behind him rushed a plump, attractive woman clad in a house dress. Before she could reach the youngster, Murphy scooped him up and said, "Here! Who told you you could have cookies before breakfast?"

The simple act of picking up the child instantly transformed the thin detective from an emotionless cop to an average husband and father. The habitual chilliness of his expression was replaced by a mock sternness recognizable even to the child as a cover for extreme gentleness. With a happy giggle the youngster allowed his father to salvage the cookie and hand it to his mother.

"Donnie always grabs a cookie before meals," Murphy explained to Harry. "It's a game. Never eats it, but likes the sport of being chased."

With unconcealed pride he introduced his wife as Anne.

"How do you do?" Mrs. Murphy said. "You'll have to excuse me while I get some breakfast into this young man."

Preoccupied with his own problem, it had not occurred to Harry until then that eight o'clock on Saturday morning was rather an early hour for a visit. Confused, he began to apologize for interrupting breakfast.

"We're finished," Anne Murphy said. "We let Donnie sleep till eight because we've never been able to get him to take an afternoon nap. You aren't disturbing us at all."

As soon as she disappeared with the boy, the thin detective became all policeman

again. In a cold voice he asked, "Now what's all this about crooked cops?"

Harry said, "You know about my wife disappearing. Last night, Sergeant Murphree took me on what was supposed to be an investigation, but which I think actually was a deliberate demonstration to me that my case was hopeless. I believe the design was either to convince me I was mad, or frighten me into the realization that if I continued to insist I had a wife and lived at Carlton Avenue, I would end up in an observation ward, and possibly be committed as insane."

"You mean you think Murphree had something to do with your wife's disappearance?"

"I'm sure he was a definite part of the cover-up." He told of Mrs. Johansen's inadvertent reference to Murphree as "Sergeant," and of the bull-necked detective driving straight to Harry's old rooming house without asking the address.

"He's not only a crook, but a cheap chiseler," Harry concluded. "Even while he was deliberately making a sucker out of me, he took time out to work me for a two-and-a-half-dollar meal in an expensive restaurant."

WITH no expression on his face to indicate his thoughts, Sergeant Murphy turned Harry's story over in his mind. At last he said, "All right, Joe Murphree is a crooked cop. But why come to me instead of taking your complaint to Headquarters?"

"Maybe at Headquarters I'd run into more crooked cops. I been thinking it over, and it seems funny the desk sergeant referred me to Murphree by name instead of just sending me to the detective bureau. Maybe they expected my visit and were all primed."

"Maybe I'm crooked too," the detective said dryly.

Harry shook his head. "Last evening I could tell you hated Joe Murphree's guts. When I became convinced Murphree was a

crooked cop, it occurred to me maybe you hated him because you're an honest one."

The thin detective emitted a non-committal grunt. "And what do you think I can do?"

"Maybe nothing," Harry said. "But you're a trained investigator and I imagine you know Wright City pretty well. I'm not even an amateur investigator and I'm practically a stranger in the city. Alone, I wouldn't even know where to start, but with your help I might at least have a chance."

"Look, Nolan," Murphy said bluntly. "This isn't even a Homicide case. At least not yet. I put in more time than I get paid for now. Why should I stick my neck out off-duty for a guy I only met yesterday?"

Harry said slowly, "No reason—except I think you're an honest cop."

The detective glanced at him sharply. "What's that got to do with it? I can name you as many honest cops on the force as crooked ones."

Harry said evenly, "Doesn't an honest cop have certain responsibilities that aren't listed in regulations? Sort of moral responsibilities? Me, I was raised to obey the law and respect the law, but never to be afraid of it. Probably most American kids grow up with that attitude. But when you find yourself in a jam and go to the police for help, only to discover the police are working with the criminals who caused your jam, it shakes your faith in the whole law enforcement system. I'm not speaking as an irate taxpayer, but merely as a citizen who has always believed in the American system of government. What would happen to our society if *all* our law-abiding citizens lost faith in our system of law enforcement?"

"Anarchy, probably," Murphy said laconically. "But even honest detective sergeants can't buck City Hall. And Joe Murphree has the backing of City Hall."

Harry was silent for a moment. "I see," he said finally. "I suppose it is asking a lot, since I imagine an honest cop in this

town has to move pretty carefully if he wants to hold his job. Naturally you have to consider your wife and kid's security."

Rising from his chair and walking to the door, Harry turned and said without any particular emphasis, "I suppose Helen isn't the first woman in Wright City who ever vanished. Or the last. It could happen in any family."

Involuntarily, the detective glanced toward the door through which his wife had disappeared with his son. Then his chill face relaxed in a wry smile.

"Come on back and sit down," he said wearily.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Proof of a Wife

SERGEANT DON MURPHY sighed. "Before you get your hopes up, I want you to understand a few things. You know much about Wright City?"

Harry shook his head. "I've only been here six weeks."

"Well, it's a wide-open town, if you know what that means."

"You mean gambling and such stuff? I know that much, because you can't walk into a tavern, drug store or filling station without stumbling over a one-armed bandit. And I've heard the fellows at work talk about gambling houses, though I've never been to one. You mean it's wide open—like Reno and Las Vegas?"

"I mean wide open like Wright City. In Reno and Las Vegas gambling is legal. Here it couldn't operate without a powerful and crooked city administration behind it. And gambling is only one of the things that make it a wide open town. We've got ninety-four fleabag hotels where anything goes, and at least two dozen retail outlets for marijuana and heroin. The city is rotten with graft from the mayor on down, with the sole exception of the Homicide Squad. Lieutenant George Blair is our boss,

and there hasn't yet been enough money minted to fix him. Otherwise the whole city is crooked. The mayor himself is only a figurehead for Big John Gault, who runs the whole shebang."

"I've heard of Big John," Harry said. "But I thought he was just some kind of politician. A couple of guys at work seem to take a kind of pride in knowing him casually. I remember one fellow bragging that he had Big John's unlisted phone number and no cop could ever nail him on a traffic violation. He said all he had to do was mention the number, and the cop would apologize for bothering him."

"Yeah," Murphy said bitterly. "Half the people in town know Big John casually, and every one of them is proud of it. John Gault is a professional glad-hander. He passes out that unlisted number like most politicians pass out cigars, and it actually is a password to kill traffic tickets. It makes everybody who has it feel like a little big shot because he is a personal friend of Big John's. Just one of the many smooth techniques Gault uses to keep himself entrenched."

"You think this Big John might have something to do with this?"

"Hardly likely," Murphy said. "But Joe Murphree is one of his boys, and if Joe is mixed up in it, somebody with real weight is giving orders. That means the minute they suspect I'm moving in, Lieutenant Blair will get instructions from the commissioner to keep his cops on homicide cases. And I'll get jerked on the carpet. You'll have to do the leg work. I'll tell you what I want, and when you get it, either bring it to me or phone it to me."

"That's fair enough," Harry said. "If you can just tell me what to do. I haven't the faintest idea where to start."

"You can start by convincing me you actually had a wife," Murphy told him. "For all I know, you're a crackpot, and I'm not wasting my off-duty time until I know different."

"But how can I prove it?" Harry protested. "Everybody lies."

"Don't you have any friends who knew you were married?"

"We haven't had time to make friends. Helen was only here three weeks, remember. The first week, while I was working she was hunting a job, and evenings we spent hunting an apartment. The second week we both worked and evenings still hunted an apartment. When we found one a week ago, we immediately got married, and while we both continued to work, this past week was our honeymoon. Who the devil wants to make friends on a honeymoon?"

The detective's thin lips quirked slightly at the corners. "How about the men you know at work? You must have mentioned Helen to some of them."

Harry reddened slightly, and when Murphy simply waited for a reply, said lamely, "There's a lot of noise. We don't talk much."

The detective looked incredulous.

"Well there is," Harry said defensively. "Ajax makes fractionization units and condensers for the oil industry. My job is fit-up. They hand me a set of blueprints and a lot of steel parts, and I tack-weld them together. I have a helper, but usually he's a different guy every day, and half the time I don't even know his name. Even if I do, we have to talk mostly in gestures. Aside from the noise we're making, all around us guys are using grinders and chippers, cranes are running overhead, and it's just one constant din."

Murphy continued to look incredulous. Harry's blush deepened.

"Well," he said reluctantly. "I do talk to guys at lunch time. But if you ever worked in a shop, you know how the guys are. They kid a lot. I didn't want a lot of cracks about honeymooning."

Murphy's expression became more understanding. "So you never mentioned at Ajax you were getting married?"

Harry shook his head ashamedly.

"All right. I'll swallow that. How about the fellows who roomed at the same place you did?"

"I never got to know any of them that well," Harry said. "Just to say hello to, or chat with a minute when we met in the hall. I doubt they even noticed I moved out."

Murphy regarded him silently for a moment. "You're getting harder and harder to swallow, Nolan. Where were you married?"

"At City Hall. By the record clerk."

"Got the certificate?"

"It disappeared along with all of Helen's stuff."

"Got any letters she wrote? Anything at all in her handwriting?"

Harry shook his head. "I did have in the apartment, but everything except my personal stuff disappeared." Then he thought of Dale Thompson's private number, which Helen had written down for him, and started to reach for his wallet. He stopped the movement and smiled ruefully when he recalled Sergeant Joe Murphree had appropriated the slip. "I let your friend Murphree get away with the only sample of her handwriting I had."

Murphy's expressionless eyes contemplated him for a long time. Finally he said, "I've got an open mind on whether or not you're a crackpot. Get down to City Hall and spend fifty cents on a certified copy of your marriage certificate. Bring me that. And you better go now, because they close at noon on Saturday."

**WHEN** Harry left the home of Sergeant Don Murphy, he felt a little cheered in spite of not having completely gained the thin detective's confidence. At least he was starting to do something definite about finding Helen. But his cheer turned to black despair when the city clerk informed him there was no record of a marriage between Harry Nolan and Helen Lawson.

He did not know the name of the record clerk who had married them, but he prowled through City Hall from one end to the other looking into offices without spotting the man. Similarly, he was unable to recall the names of the witnesses, remembering only that they were a young couple applying for a marriage license and had been recruited from the hall by the record clerk. It gave him no satisfaction whatever to realize both names and their addresses were on the missing marriage certificate.

He phoned a report to Sergeant Murphy from a booth at City Hall.

Murphy grunted noncommittally. "Either somebody really big is behind this, or you're an out-and-out crackpot," he said. "Try the Midtown Employment Agency and see if they have a record of your wife's referral to Dale Thompson."

With dampened enthusiasm Harry took a streetcar to the Midtown Employment Agency. He was not surprised to discover the agency not only had no record of the referral, but denied ever registering a client named Helen Lawson.

Dispirited, he phoned Sergeant Murphy again. "Listen," he said, "I can prove by people in Des Moines there is such a girl as Helen Lawson and we planned to get married. She hasn't any parents, but we had a lot of mutual friends who knew our plans, and she has an aunt there who must have known she left Des Moines to join me."

"That won't prove she's your wife, or even that she ever arrived in Wright City," the detective said. "For all I know she may have disappeared en route, and maybe worry has sent you off your rocker so you imagine you got married."

Harry asked wearily, "What should I do now?"

"Try the newspaper morgues. Saturday marriages would be listed in Monday's papers."

There were two newspapers in Wright City, the Evening Herald and the Morning Sun. Just before noon Harry phoned Ser-

geant Murphy for the third time, and this time there was jubilance in his voice.

"I didn't find the item," he reported. "But at least I finally found definite evidence of cover-up. Monday's morgue copy of both papers has the list of marriages scissored out."

"I hit something too," Murphy told him. "Why didn't you mention you had a post office box?"

Harry repeated blankly, "A post office box?"

"Yeah. It occurred to me if you were new in town and had no permanent address, you might have rented a box. And people don't fix Uncle Sam's post office. So I made a phone call."

"Of course!" Harry said, seeing the light and berating himself for not thinking of it sooner. "I rented it in both our names as soon as I got to town, because I knew Helen was coming shortly, and then after we got married, I changed it to Mr. and Mrs. Harry Nolan. I made the change Monday."

"Yeah. After I told them you were a suspect in a homicide case, they looked up the record and told me about the change."

"A suspect?" Harry asked, surprised.

"The post office is a little finicky about handing out information even to cops unless you got a good reason. Meet me at Twelfth and Monroe at one o'clock."

**H**ARRY was puzzled by the detective's abrupt order to meet him at Twelfth and Monroe Streets, but he was also elated. Apparently the evidence of the post office box had converted Sergeant Murphy into belief of Harry's story, for his tone over the telephone had been almost banteringly friendly. Harry hoped that the rendezvous meant the sergeant now intended to take an active part in the investigation instead of merely sitting at home and issuing orders.

With his confidence elevated and with an hour to kill before he met Murphy, Harry suddenly realized he was hungry. Then with some degree of shock he realized he was not

merely hungry, but famished, as he had eaten nothing since noon the previous day. Entering the first restaurant he saw, he ate two blue plate specials.

Harry alighted from a streetcar at Twelfth and Monroe at ten of one. On one corner there was a branch public library, and he sat on its wide steps to wait for the detective.

Sergeant Murphy arrived in his ten-year-old sedan promptly at one.

"Let's go inside," he said laconically, and walked up the library steps.

At the desk Murphy asked for two "stack" cards, entered the date and his signature on one and had Harry similarly fill out the other. In exchange for the cards the attendant gave them a key.

A moment later Murphy was unlocking a grilled iron door which opened on a flight of stairs leading downward. At the bottom of the stairs they found a vault-like room containing tier on tier of shelves loaded with periodicals and newspapers.

"The stacks," Murphy explained. "You'll find everything from 1864 issues of *Godey's Lady Book* to current issues of *Argosy*. I thought maybe our friends might have forgotten public libraries keep files of newspapers as well as newspaper morgues do."

They had forgotten, Harry and Murphy discovered. No one had used scissors on the stack copies of Monday's *Herald* and *Sun*. And both listed the marriage of Harry and Helen on the previous Saturday.

Harry let out a long breath. Sergeant Murphy regarded him with a wry smile.

"Don't get your hopes too high," he advised. "This puts me behind you a hundred percent, but I'm just a dumb cop, not Sherlock Holmes."

Harry said with utter confidence, "With one phone call and one trip you've managed to find two bits of evidence that I've been telling the truth. We'll find Helen now."

Murphy was less confident. "We've still got a long way to go. But I've an idea of where to start."

A long table for the convenience of research workers was centered in each of the narrow corridors formed by the tiers of shelves. Lifting a stack of newspapers from a shelf to one of the tables, Murphy returned to the shelf for another stack and laid it beside the first.

He said, "When I say I'm behind you a hundred percent, I mean I'm accepting what your wife told you as truth, too. I think she really was Dale Thompson's secretary and this Dorothy Wentworth you talked to lied. It could be more than coincidence that your wife disappeared just as her boss dropped dead. We'll start two months back and read every word Thompson put in his column. Maybe we'll just waste time, but maybe we'll find a hint of what this is all about."

Off and on Harry had glanced over Dale Thompson's syndicated column for a number of years, but he had never before read him with concentration. The man had been a reporter rather than a commentator, Harry discovered, reporting facts as he saw them, but rarely drawing any editorial inferences from his stories. He had an urgent, staccato style which tended to make every item of news seem sensational, whether it was the exposé of an ambassador's liaison with a chambermaid, or merely the expectant motherhood of some well-known actress.

His material was not as specialized as that of most columnists, for he roamed at will from cafe society gossip to politics, war and crime news, and occasionally even to sports. Sometimes his column was straight reporting, other times he would insert personal anecdotes, often of a humorous nature, describing such things as a horse race he had witnessed, a trip to his dentist, or the political views of his favorite barber. Whenever he drifted off into such anecdotes he dropped his staccato reporting style in favor of more leisurely and whimsical narrative style.

It was an anecdote of this nature about six weeks back which brought a low whistle from Sergeant Murphy. Harry had already

passed it without grasping its significance when the detective called his attention to it.

"Listen to this," Murphy said, reading aloud. "'Monday was our semi-annual checkup time, when old Doc Moody taps our knee with a rubber mallet, looks disappointed when our reactions indicate we have not yet gone mad, sticks a stethoscope to our chest and shakes his head sadly because the pump is still going strong, checks our blood pressure and, after numerous other tests, reluctantly decides we may last another six months. At fifty-two no one has a right to health as good as ours, Doc complains, testily letting us know that if all his patients stood the gaff as well as we do, he'd have to cut down to two Cadillacs.'"

Looking at the paper's date over the sergeant's shoulder, Harry said thoughtfully, "Six weeks back he had a sound heart, eh?"

"Yeah. Think I'll have a little talk with Doc Moody." Murphy made a note of the name on a small pad.

In silence they both read on for a time. Harry, being the faster reader, was several columns ahead of Murphy when he caught the next pertinent item. And this time he recognized its importance.

"Get this, Sergeant," he said, reading aloud in turn. "'A local big shot politician is due for trouble up to his eyebrows when Uncle Sam receives unexpected evidence of his involvement in the narcotic business. Watch this column for sensational developments."

This time the detective peered over Harry's shoulder. "April sixth," he muttered, "Three weeks ago."

"Could the local politician be your Big John Gault?" Harry asked.

"Could be," Murphy resumed reading.

IN THE very next column Harry encountered an item which sent his pulses pounding. It read: *We used to disagree with the philosophy of the racketeer politician who runs things around here that every man has his price. Reluctantly we've come*

*around to his point of view since discovering his money was able to buy a leak right in our own office. The firing of a hireling has plugged the leak, but it can't bring back the evidence the racketeer bought from our files. The sensational expose promised yesterday is postponed for the time being.*

Excited, Harry showed the item to Murphy. "He fired that Wentworth woman!" he exclaimed. "That's how he happened to need a secretary just when Helen was looking for a job. Somehow, after he was dead and Helen disappeared, they got her to go back and pretend she'd been working for him all along."

Murphy merely grunted.

The second-from-last column, that of the previous Thursday, contained the item which seemed to please Murphy most. It read: *Wright City's Mr. Big is going to be very angry with his city comptroller for being careless with a certain black ledger. But he'll have a long time to cool off. About forty years. We'll start printing excerpts from the ledger tomorrow.*

The final column, that of the day before, was full of big name gossip, but made no mention of the black ledger.

"That does it," Murphy said with a note of finality. He began stacking the papers back on their shelf.

"Does what?" Harry asked, moving to assist in the task.

"Gives me an excuse to start taking an official interest in your wife's disappearance."

The remark made no sense to Harry, but the detective apparently did not care to elaborate. When the papers were back on the shelf in proper order, he led the way out of the place.

A block from the library Sergeant Murphy parked his sedan in front of a drug store. When Harry followed him inside, the detective made for the phone booths at the rear. Turning to the "M" section of the phone book, he ran his finger along a page until he reached a whole quarter

column of "Moodys". Harry noted that only two Moodys had the initials M.D. behind the name.

"George and Henry Moody," Murphy said. "We'll try George first."

Dropping a dime in the phone slot, the detective dialed a number. Through the open booth door Harry heard him ask if he were speaking to the Doctor Moody who was Dale Thompson's physician. After a moment he grunted a thanks and hung up.

"Dr. George Moody is Dr. Henry Moody's son," he remarked to Harry. "He says the old man was Thompson's doctor."

This time when he dropped his dime and dialed, he pulled the booth door shut so that Harry was unable to hear the conversation. His talk with Dr. Henry Moody was remarkably brief, however, for in less than a minute he was out of the booth.

"Let's go visit my boss," he said tersely.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Killer's Corner

LIEUTENANT GEORGE BLAIR, head of the Wright City Homicide Squad, proved to be a wiry man of fifty with gray hair, a gentle face and eyes as hard as emery.

After acknowledging Harry's introduction, he inquired of Sergeant Murphy, "Busman's holiday, Don?"

"Sort of, Lieutenant. This one looks too hot to wait. I guess you heard about Dale Thompson's death."

The lieutenant nodded. "Heart attack yesterday morning."

"I make it out homicide."

The lieutenant's eyebrows raised. Setting himself in his chair, he clasped hands over his stomach and said mildly, "Shoot."

"What started me on this was Harry Nolan here coming in to report his wife missing," the sergeant explained. "The desk sent him to see Joe Murphree, but by accident he got to me instead and told his story before either of us realized he was talking

to the wrong guy." Briefly, Murphy recounted the facts of Helen's disappearance, the negative results of the investigation made by Sergeant Joe Murphree, and the subsequent investigation he and Harry had made that day.

"We ended up by reading Dale Thompson's column for the past two months," he concluded. "Three weeks ago he hinted at an exposure in his column of a local political big shot being tied in with the dope racket. The next day he mentioned firing an employee for lifting what evidence he had and peddling it to the political big shot. Only this time he made it more definite by calling him the racketeer politician who runs Wright City."

"Big John Gault," Lieutenant Blair said thoughtfully.

"Exactly. Day before yesterday he announced he had gotten hold of a certain black ledger which would put Mr. Big Shot away for forty years, and the next day he would start printing excerpts from the ledger. But the next day he died, and when his final column appeared, it contained no mention of the ledger."

Lieutenant Blair considered his sergeant thoughtfully. "So you think perhaps he was bumped to stop publication of whatever was in the ledger, and somebody substituted another column for the one he had ready to submit? Good enough motive, but pretty thin evidence of homicide in the face of a natural causes death certificate."

"I've got more," Murphy assured him. "Six weeks ago Thompson mentioned in his column having a physical examination and passing with flying colors. I just phoned his regular doc, who verified he had never detected any heart condition. And Thompson's regular doctor was *not called* in the case. The first he knew about it was when he read it in the papers. He doesn't know who was called."

"Hmm," the lieutenant said.

"Add to that Thompson's secretary disappearing so completely there isn't even

evidence she ever existed, and the secretary who presumably was fired three weeks ago reappearing and claiming she had never left the job, and at the very least you've got evidence of conspiracy. My opinion is Thompson was murdered and Mrs. Nolan disappeared because of the black ledger Thompson mentioned."

For a few moments Lieutenant Blair said nothing, simply pursing his lips and frowning at one corner of the room. At last he looked up with a crooked smile.

"Big John has been pretty careful about tangling with this department, Don. I kind of doubt he'd take a chance on trying to cover up a murder."

"To beat a forty-year rap I'd try murder myself, Lieutenant."

"Yeah, I see your point. But you know this department is in a peculiar position. For ten years we've been in a state of armed truce with the rest of the city administration. Gault and his crew never try to fix a homicide case, and in return we keep our noses out of everything that isn't homicide business. And for ten years we've all known the minute either side steps over the line, it's all out war."

Sergeant Murphy asked quietly, "You mean forget it, Lieutenant?"

The lieutenant's face remained gentle, but his eyes could have chipped stone. "I mean if you make a mistake, the next head of the Homicide Squad will take orders from John Gault." He glanced at his watch. "You go on duty in an hour. It's your case. Move quietly and be sure there's no leak at all until you have it airtight."

"Yes, sir. Any other instructions?"

"Yeah. For your autopsy order stay away from Judge Bender and Judge Livingston. Bender blabs and Livingston is in Gault's pocket. Contact either Judge Ward or Judge Centner." He paused a moment, then added reflectively, "If the autopsy is negative, we'll have to pull in our horns fast and start thinking up alibis."

"Sure—if it's negative."

When they were once again outside, the sergeant said to Harry, "Go on home and sit tight. There isn't a thing we can do until we get an autopsy report, and that will take twenty-four hours. If anything comes up, I'll phone you at Mrs. Weston's. If you don't hear from me, call me at home Monday morning and I'll give you a briefing."

"But what about Helen?" Harry asked.

Murphy dropped a hand on his shoulder. "You'll just have to sweat it out. We can't make a move until we definitely establish Thompson's death was homicide. You heard the lieutenant."

"Suppose you can't prove it's homicide?"

The sergeant grinned dryly. "Then I'll ask you to give me a job reference over at Ajax. In the meantime, don't bother me by calling up for progress reports before Monday. I'll have enough on my mind until then."

SO HARRY went back to Mrs. Weston's rooming house to sweat it out. It was the longest period of sweating he ever did. From four o'clock Saturday afternoon, when he reached his room, until Monday morning he left the room only for meals, afraid Sergeant Murphy might phone while he was gone. But the sergeant did not phone.

Just before dusk Sunday evening the downstairs bell rang and Harry glanced out his window to see a squad car at the curb. A few minutes later a burly policeman went down the front steps with Mrs. Weston, helped the landlady into the car and drove away. As the car started off, Harry glimpsed Sergeant Murphy in the back seat.

Overpowering curiosity almost made him phone Headquarters to inquire what this meant, but he was deterred by the definite instructions of the sergeant. He spent a second sleepless night and phoned Murphy at home at exactly eight A.M. Monday.

"Aren't you working today?" the sergeant asked.

"Working? You think I could calmly go to work without knowing whether Helen's alive or dead?"

Sergeant Murphy said quietly, "It's my guess she's alive."

Harry's heart jumped. "You've found out where she is?"

"No. Let's take one thing at a time. First, the autopsy on Dale Thompson showed poisoning by potassium cyanide, apparently administered in coffee. The guess is he got it at breakfast a couple of hours before eleven A.M., the time on his death certificate. We've got the doc who signed the certificate, but I think he's in the clear. He's seventy-eight years old, half blind, half deaf and semi-retired, which probably was why he was called. The medical examiner tells me unless he suspects poisoning or happens to catch a whiff of bitter almonds, any doctor might diagnose a cyanide death as a simple coronary. This guy was a cinch to. He was called to Thompson's penthouse at eleven o'clock by Dorothy Wentworth, who told him she was Thompson's secretary."

Harry asked, "Did she kill him?"

"Unless she's a wonderful actress, she didn't even know it was murder. But that's ahead of the story. Soon we got the autopsy report, we quietly pulled in Dorothy Wentworth, Mrs. and Mr. Kurt Arnold, the apartment manager, Mrs. Johansen and Mrs. Weston. We stuck them in separate cells, let them brood awhile, and then informed all but Dorothy Wentworth we were charging them with conspiracy to commit murder. We told the Wentworth woman we were holding her on suspicion of first degree homicide."

The sergeant emitted a dry chuckle. Wentworth broke first, and as soon as the others learned of her break, they all started squealing like rats. Dorothy Wentworth's story is she was phoned by a man named Gerald Crane, apparently the same man to whom she sold the evidence that got her fired. He told her Thompson had unex-

pectedly died of a heart attack and he wanted her to put on an act for him. He told her she'd get two thousand dollars if she went to Thompson's penthouse, pretended she was still his secretary and phoned a certain physician to come at once because her boss had just had a heart attack. He warned her someone would probably call trying to locate the real secretary, and the police might even come around asking about her. But he told her the investigating cop would be in on the deal, and all she had to do was deny ever hearing of the woman. She says she suspected the plot had something to do with stopping the item about the ledger, but she thought Crane was simply taking advantage of Thompson's sudden death, and she didn't suspect murder."

Harry asked, "Who is this Gerald Crane?"

"A flunky of Big John Gault's. The rest of the story we got from our other witnesses. Crane contacted the apartment manager first and fixed him with a thousand dollars plus decorating expenses to get in a crew of workmen and change your apartment around. The Kurt Arnolds were moved in by Crane a half hour before you got home from work. Their fee was only five hundred. Apparently Crane got stinger as he went along.

"From the apartment manager Crane learned the former addresses of you and your wife. He fixed Mrs. Weston with two hundred bucks, had your personal stuff moved from the apartment back to your old room, and had the lock from your apartment transferred to your room door.

"At your wife's old rooming house apparently Crane ran into a snag. Seems Mrs. Swovboda was honest. We don't know where she is, but she definitely didn't sell out to Mrs. Johansen and move to Florida. Mrs. Johansen is an old-time bit actress, and she was moved into the rooming house by Crane about an hour before you arrived with Sergeant Joe Murphree. All she got was a mere hundred. She grew

quite upset when she learned she was at the bottom of the salary scale."

HARRY asked, "Have you got this man Gerald Crane?"

"Not yet," Sergeant Murphy said. "We're a little handicapped because there are only eleven men on the Homicide Squad. If we put out a general call on him, we could draw on the whole police department, but there's too many leaks in the department. Crane would know about it within minutes. We want Crane under wraps before anybody even knows we're investigating the case."

"I see," Harry said dubiously. "But what about Helen? What's the reason behind all this elaborate plot? And what makes you think she's still alive?"

"It's pure theory from here on," the sergeant admitted. "But I think it's sound reasoning. Obviously, as Thompson's secretary, your wife knew about the ledger, too. I don't think Gerald Crane or Big John Gault have their hands on the ledger yet. If they had, probably your wife would simply have been killed in a traffic accident or some such thing. Since she wasn't, they must be holding her somewhere trying to pry out of her where the ledger is."

Harry said slowly, "You mean torture?"

Murphy hesitated a moment. Then he said reluctantly, "Possibly. But that's better than being dead."

A wave of sickness ran over Harry. In a numb voice he said, "I still don't understand why they went through this elaborate farce of changing the apartment and all."

"You would if you thought about it," Murphy told him. "If Dale Thompson's secretary mysteriously disappeared the same day the columnist died, it would look suspicious as the devil. And with that item about the ledger appearing only the day before, the finger would point straight at Big John Gault. The only way they could hold her without raising such a furor that even the FBI might start nosing around to see if

maybe she'd been kidnapped, was to make it appear she never existed. So when Thompson died, his secretary continued on public display in the person of Dorothy Wentworth."

"I see," Harry said slowly. "Is there any way I can help from here on out?"

"Yeah. Just sit quiet and stay out of our hair till we break this thing. And we will, don't worry."

Yes, Harry thought as he hung up. But in the meantime what kind of pain was Helen suffering?

After fifteen minutes of sitting on the bed and smoking cigarettes, he knew he could not possibly spend another day simply waiting in his room. He had to have some kind of action or go crazy.

The wild thought occurred to him of looking up Big John Gault's address, calling on the man and beating out of him Helen's whereabouts. But immediately he realized the man probably not only had bodyguards, but any such attempted act would blow wide open the secrecy Sergeant Murphy wanted to maintain. Reluctantly he decided the Homicide Squad was undoubtedly better equipped to deal with murderers than a half crazed husband would be.

Finally he settled on the innocuous action of going to the post office to see if he and Helen had any mail.

Though the post office was only three blocks from their apartment on Carlton Avenue, a factor in their deciding to keep the box even after they had a permanent address, it was fifteen blocks from Mrs. Weston's rooming house. Harry took a streetcar.

There was some mail. An envelope containing a coupon worth ten cents on the purchase of a large box of soap flakes, a card addressed to Miss Helen Lawson from Helen's aunt in Des Moines, who had not yet been informed her niece was married, and a slip informing him there was a package at the package desk.

As he started toward the package desk,

two men crowded against him from either side. Politely he waited for them to move out of the way, but neither moved. Instead he felt the prod of something hard and round in his left kidney.

The man on his left, a tall lank individual with a gray face said, "Yeah, it's a gun. Just move toward the door like we was three pals, or it'll go off."

Slowly, Harry glanced from the gray-faced man to the plump, round-headed man on his right. The latter gave him a happy grin.

"There's another one right close to your right kidney. Do like the man says."

At a gentle prod from the man on the left, he began to move without hurry toward the door. All about them people were waiting in queues, stamping letters or exasperatedly trying to write with post-office pens, but no one paid the slightest attention as the closely grouped trio left the building. The sidewalk was full of hurrying people too, but not one so much as glanced at them.

At the curb, in a space marked, *Reserved for Post Office customers. Ten minute parking only*, stood a green Buick sedan. The round man on Harry's right opened the rear door and the gray-faced man prodded Harry in. He followed behind Harry to sit beside him, while the plump man rounded the car to slide behind the wheel.

As he pulled away from the parking place, the man behind the wheel said breezily, "We been waiting for you since the post office opened at eight. We figured you'd come after your mail eventually."

Harry asked, "What do you want with me?" If this is a holdup, all I've got with me is twelve dollars."

The plump man laughed. Harry's seat companion said nothing, merely quietly holding his gun pointed casually in Harry's direction.

Harry grew conscious that he was still gripping his mail in one hand. As he stuffed

it into his inside breast pocket, the gray-faced man glanced at him sharply, but made no comment.

THE rest of the trip was made without conversation. It was not a long trip, about twenty-five blocks, but the plump man drove leisurely and obeyed all traffic regulations. When the car left the downtown business district, they passed through a middle-class residential district, then through a poorer class district and finally through the slums, always moving in the general direction of the river.

In the waterfront area, on a street consisting largely of vacant warehouses and decrepit office buildings which had been condemned by the city to make room for a waterfront parkway which never materialized, the car suddenly swung through the open truck entrance of what looked from the outside like an unoccupied warehouse. As his seat mate backed from the car and gestured with his gun for Harry to alight, the plump driver returned to the truck entrance and closed the doors.

Then the two men urged him up a flight of stairs and into a barnlike room large enough to office at least fifty clerks. There were no longer any desks in it, however, its furnishings now consisting of only a kitchen table and a few straight chairs, three folding canvas cots containing single blankets and a packing case with a table model radio on it.

One corner of Harry's mind noted that two men sat at the kitchen table and a third sat on one of the cots, but the notation was merely automatic, for his attention centered on the figure stretched full length on a second cot. It was Helen and she was alive.

Ignoring the sharp command of the gray-faced man, Harry ran to his wife and took her in his arms. She looked up at him wonderingly, her face drawn with fatigue and streaked with dried tears, then buried her head in his shoulder with a little whimper.

After a moment she exhaustedly lay back on the pillow and looked up at him with sorrow. "I hoped they'd let you alone," she whispered. "Why did they have to involve you?"

"Have they hurt you?" Harry demanded.

"My feet," she said. "Just my feet." She closed her eyes with an expression of pain.

Twisting in his seat on the cot, Harry stared down at his wife's feet. Both were encased in bandages.

An almost insane rage engulfed him. Slowly he rose to his feet and glared through a crimson haze at the five men in the room. The man seated on the other cot was thin and pock-marked and had cold eyes which stared back at Harry indifferently. Of the two men seated at the table, one was huge and red-faced and carried about him an air of bluff good humor. The other was slim and distinguished-looking, with a thin, austere face and iron-gray hair which curled upward over his ears. The two men who had brought him in stood just inside the door.

Harry took a step toward the table. "Which one of you . . . ?" he said with muffled incoherency. "I'm going to—"

Casually, the pock-marked man on the cot produced a knife with a thin six inch blade. He balanced it on his palm and studied Harry appraisingly. Harry swung his gaze to the man.

"Are you the one?" he asked softly.

The knife flipped in a small arc and landed back in the man's palm. His eyes remained on Harry. "Yeah," he said. "Cigarettes on the soles, if you're interested. Tape on the mouth, to keep her from yelling. Make you mad?"

Harry's muscles bunched for a blind rush, then he froze as a voice from the table cracked like a pistol shot. "Hold it, Nolan!"

Harry twisted toward the voice. It was the big, red-faced man who had spoken.

In a reasonable tone the man said, "Rip-

per can slice the edge of a playing card with that thing at thirty feet. On top of that my two boys at the door have cocked pistols aimed at your guts. Nobody wants to harm either you or your wife. Let's talk things over like reasonable human beings."

He waved a hand at one of the vacant chairs around the table. Harry glanced back at the knife, then at the two guns centered at him from the doorway. Finally he looked down at Helen, who gave him a smile full of pain and shook her head hopelessly.

Harry's shoulders slumped and he walked over to seat himself at the table.

"Let me introduce myself," the big man said. "I'm John Gault, and this is my assistant, Gerald Crane."

**W**ITHOUT preamble, Big John Gault announced what he wanted: the black ledger mentioned in Dale Thompson's column. He was convinced Helen knew where it was, but had been unable to persuade her to tell. Harry had been brought in to aid the persuasion. If he could talk his wife into disclosing where the ledger was, Big John was willing to pay them five thousand dollars and put them on a train for Des Moines, with the stipulation that neither ever return to Wright City.

The alternative Big John did not mention, but the implication was obvious.

Harry suppressed his rage enough to remark, "This ledger must be important." He turned toward Helen. "What's in it, honey?"

Lifelessly Helen said, "A complete record of payoffs in Wright City for the past ten years. Publication would have put John Gault and his whole crooked gang behind bars."

"And you know where it is?"

The distinguished-looking Gerald Crane answered for her. "We talked to the elevator operator at the Newbold Arms. Your wife arrived for work Friday at eight-thirty, and left the building again ten min-

utes later with a package the size of the ledger under her arm. She was gone twenty minutes and returned without it. In the interim my friend Ripper and I . . . ah . . . called on Mr. Thompson, so when your wife returned, she walked right into our arms. Obviously Thompson suspected we might try to recover the ledger and had your wife secrete it somewhere. She's wasting her time and ours by insisting she doesn't know where it is."

*A package under her arm,* Harry repeated to himself. His thoughts touched the package slip in his inside pocket, and he knew where the ledger was. Helen had mailed it to their box.

"Why have you held out, honey?" he asked gently. "Was it worth torture?"

Her pain-racked eyes swung to him. "Dale Thompson worked ten years to break this gang's power," she said quietly.

Harry said thoughtfully, "Five thousand dollars is a lot of money. Suppose we made a deal so they couldn't kill us? Suppose we insisted on getting to Des Moines first, and phoning back long distance the information about the ledger? They'd have to trust us to phone, and we'd have to trust them to send the five thousand dollars."

John Gault said quickly, "We should have picked you up sooner. I'll buy that one with a slight change. We'll put your wife on a train for Des Moines, hold you as a hostage so she doesn't get any ideas about double-crossing us, and release you with five thousand bucks the minute we get the ledger back."

Helen had looked at Harry with disappointed shock. Looking back at her without expression, Harry slowly let one eyelid droop. Momentarily she looked startled, but she covered her understanding that Harry's motive was other than appeared on the surface by making her eyes harden.

She said to John Gault, "And let you keep on running your gambling houses and dope shops? That's what Mr. Thompson was fighting, and what he died for."

"You'd rather we'd both die?" Harry asked reasonably.

Helen looked at him silently for a moment, then her lips trembled and she burst into tears.

It took but a few minutes to work out the details of the agreement. The two men who had brought in Harry would get Helen to the noon train, which was scheduled to arrive in Des Moines at eight that evening. Helen would phone John Gault's unlisted number before midnight, and as soon as the ledger was recovered, Harry would be escorted by the same pair to a train for Des Moines.

She clung to Harry for a moment before she was carried out, but her face was set and emotionless as the trio disappeared through the door. Only a fleeting, final glance of worry from her at the last moment told Harry she knew he was planning something desperate.

Big John Gault rose to his feet. "Just make yourself comfortable and we'll hope to have you out of here by midnight," he advised Harry. "You seem like a sensible young man, but I'm sure you'll understand I can't taken any chances." To the pock-marked Ripper he said, "You can handle him all right alone, can't you?"

Ripper gave the knife in his hand an expert flip and looked at Harry with contempt. He did not bother to reply.

"Ten expect us back about midnight," Gault said. "The boys will bring you in lunch and supper."

He motioned to Gerald Crane and the two of them left together.

Harry studied the pock-marked man reflectively. "It's only about ten o'clock," he said. "You going to sit with that thing in your hand for fourteen hours?"

Smoothly the pock-marked man flipped it once more, then slid it out of sight beneath his coat. In a bored tone he said, "I can get it out and sink it anywhere I want faster than you could spit. Your limit is fifteen

*(Continued to page 112)*

# THE BLOODY WASH



The murderer had committed the perfect crime! No one knew about it but himself—and that was the one fatal mistake he had made. . . .

By HAROLD HELFER

**T**HREE are some who contend that there is no such thing as a perfect crime—but what would you call the Affair of the Linen Bleaching Yard?

The Irish always have been very proud of their linens, and at the turn of the century one of the most successful linen bleaching concerns in the Belfast area was that owned by Shane Sinclair. But despite a considerable flow of customers Mr. Sinclair was not a happy man. Someone was stealing the linens that were set out on the lines to bleach.

It got so bad that Mr. Sinclair hired a watchman. But the bleaching area was farflung and the thief was ingenious enough to continue with his pilfering.

The matter finally reached a crucial point. Fed up with all the thefts, insurance companies refused coverage to Mr. Sinclair any more on the vanishing linens. And chagrined at being unable to get their prize linens back, some of the customers were beginning to take their business elsewhere.

Shane Sinclair turned to his butler and confident, spare, white-haired, 67-year-old Edward Halloran and said: "What shall I do?"

"The identity of this thief is probably known by someone—relatives, friends, other thieves," the old butler said thoughtfully. "The offer of a reward—say, 100

pounds—might bring us some information about who he is."

A hundred pounds was quite a bit of money in those days, but it struck the desperate Mr. Sinclair as a plan worth trying.

It was shortly after the announcement of this reward that the butler with the snow-white hair made the acquaintance of a young man of the neighborhood, 19-year-old Jimmie O'Brien. They seemed to hit it off from the very beginning. The old man would say that if he had a son he'd want him to be just like Jimmie; and to show that he reciprocated this fondness, Jimmie gave the white-haired man a pocket knife for a present.

One day the old butler invited the youth up to his quarters for supper. "Don't say anything to anybody about it. You know how some employers are about their servants entertaining," cautioned Edward Halloran. "And be very quiet when you arrive. Mr. Sinclair will be in bed then, but he's a light sleeper and we might awake him."

Mr. Sinclair lived near his linen bleaching yards and his butler occupied an adjoining flat. An hour or so before Jimmie was to show up for supper, Halloran went out into the yards with a cup in his hand. "It's a chilly night," he said to the watchman. "I thought a spot of tea might be just the thing for you."

The watchman thanked the butler for his

kindness, smacked his lips as he drank the tea—and then began to feel peculiarly groggy. In fact, a few minutes later, as hard as he tried fighting against it, he was sound asleep. The old butler then proceeded to take linen off the line and make them into bundles. . . .

Young Jimmie O'Brien showed up on time at the butler's quarters and he and the white-haired old man had a very enjoyable meal together.

"Yes, my lad," said the old man, "you being here, why, that makes it a perfect day for me." Then with a sigh, he said, "In fact, there is only one thing at all that you'd call a flaw."

Jimmie asked him what it was. "That knife you gave me," he said. "I left it among some of the linen bundles out in the yard. You know, I have become fond of that knife, standing as a token for our friendship as it does. But I daresay it will still be there in the morning."

Jimmie promptly said he'd go out and get the knife. The old man replied he wouldn't think of putting the youth to that trouble, but Jimmie insisted.

As soon as Jimmie went into the yard, the old man hurriedly removed his clothes. Underneath was his night shirt. He grabbed a shotgun, went into Mr. Sinclair's room, roused him and whispered: "The linen thief—I think he's in the yard now. Some noise out there woke me from my sleep . . ."

**T**HETwo men went to the window and looked out. Sure enough, in the moonlight they could see the silhouette of a crouching figure. "Look how stealthy his actions are," whispered the old servant. "And he's already made bundles out of some of the linen. There's no doubt about it."

The white-haired butler, whose hobby was marksmanship, propped his gun on the window sill, took careful aim and fired. The figure in the yard promptly crumbled to the ground.

Shane Sinclair was aghast when he recognized the dead man in his bleaching yard. "Why, it's young Jimmie O'Brien!" he gasped. "I knew him well—always thought he was a fine, promising lad!"

"I knew him too and liked him," sighed the butler.

A trial was held, but the boy's role as a thief was so obvious and the kindly-looking white-haired man's action so understandingly proper that it was a mere formality. Mr. Sinclair not only stood by his butler staunchly, but after the trial, gave him a fine vacation.

So there you have it, the coldly murderous old man with the snow-white hair and the saintly look pulling the wool over everybody's eyes.

Not only did he get the 100 pound reward, but Mr. Sinclair, to show his gratitude still more to his faithful old employee, made him superintendent of his bleaching yards. And when business, now that all the thieving has stopped, became very good again, Mr. Sinclair made Edward Halloran a full partner in the business of the linen-bleaching yard.

So here, sure enough, you have what seems to be the perfect crime.

And yet . . .

There is someone. Not a living soul, but a dead one. Conscience. The old man's health suddenly began to fail. One day, feeling that he was dying, he confessed to what he'd done—that he'd framed the boy and deliberately killed him.

As it turned out, the old man had been imagining his condition, no doubt part of the torment of his conscience. Instead of dying, he found himself in a jail cell, charged with murder.

He was now a very old man, in his 70's, but not a single person came forward to ask for mercy for him.

And so the man who had committed "the perfect crime" finally wound up in the annals of crime as one of the oldest persons ever to executed.





He got up wiping blood  
from his mouth. . .

# HEART SHOT

By DEAN EVANS

---

The fifty grand that no one knew  
about was all Lonnie's—if he was  
both lucky and smart. So was a bullet  
in the back—if he wasn't!

---

TONY JORDAN sat in the only comfortable chair in the room and scowled through a dusty window at the dying rays of the western sun sinking over the California-Nevada line.

Dead country, he reflected gloomily. Like everything else out here. They build a few gaming palaces, churn in a divorce lawyer or two, shoot publicity around like scattering feed to the chickens, and then sit

back and watch all the suckers roll in.

This was Nevada, this was. This was Reno. *This*—he pulled his eyes away from the window and glared around the four walls that enclosed him—*this* was room 408 of the Pachappa Hotel. A flea bag. A joint.

That was before something fatal happened.

That was before somebody knocked on the door of 408 and came barging on in.

That was before somebody pulled a gun out of his pocket and grinned evilly at Tony and said:

"Hello, Tony. Good-bye, Tony. You dirty louse."

\* \* \*

Lonnie Stone looked down at the dead man in the chair. He glared at the almost unbelievably small red spot in the center of Tony's white shirt front. Lonnie was tall without seeming so; hard without seeming so. He was all that a guy had to be to be night manager of a place like the *Pachappa Hotel*.

"He really bought the big one, huh, Mr. Stone?" It was the bell-boy who had discovered Tony Jordan.

Lonnie Stone looked up from the corpse. "Yeah, kid," he said. "He bought the big one."

"What now?" asked the bell boy. "The cops, huh?"

"Yeah. The cops." Lonnie shooed the kid out of the room, went out himself, locked the door carefully behind him. "Kid?" he called softly after the retreating boy. The boy stopped. "It'll keep lots brighter if we don't go blattting around about it."

"Huh? Oh sure, Mr. Stone. Trust me."

Lonnie grinned distastefully to himself and walked down the hall. A fine damned thing to happen to a guy who's going on his vacation in the morning. If he didn't watch it the law would have him hanging around for days just to answer their damned fool questions about a stiff who

wouldn't be caring much about this himself—or about anything else again ever.

Lonnie went downstairs to his office, shut the door behind him, locked it. He went to a big safe in the corner, twirled the knob, opened it. He reached in, got out a little box, opened that, and took out one of the Pachappa's envelopes. It was sealed and on the front in Lonnie's own scrawly handwriting was the name: *Tony Jordan*.

He took it over to his desk and slit it. He remembered the night—about a week after Jordan up in 408 had registered in—that Jordan had handed the three things to him for safekeeping.

Lonnie shook the envelope over the desk. One was a letter that had come to Jordan here at the hotel. One was a slip of paper that bore nine words. The third thing was a single thousand dollar bill.

Lonnie took the letter first. He went through it fast until he hit a snag. He went back again, read more slowly:

. . . Tony, won't you chang your mind?  
The baby sobs constantly and Mama mia  
rocks him all the day long. Oh Tony! Baby  
is a year old today but he does not creep, he  
does not crawl . . .

A tear-jerker, Lonnie thought. The guy's out here for a divorce and the wife tries the last lone trump trying to get him back. Lonnie shrugged. Tough. So what? The letter was signed *Angela* and the return address was 1745 New Argo Street, Buffalo, N. Y.

He looked only briefly at the thousand dollar bill. What interested him most was the slip of paper that bore nine fascinating words. He studied them now:

*Black Swan—on board—sand bar  
Fifty thousand cash*

The Black Swan sounded like a boat. Maybe this scow was sunk—or stranded—on a sand bar. On board her was stashed away fifty thousand bucks. He thought about that for a minute. Thinking back to

geography days in school he dimly remembered a burg called Buffalo that was located smack on a chunk of water big enough to float all Reno. He thought maybe it was one of the Great Lakes. Maybe Ontario. Or maybe the littlest one called Erie.

It sounded like a dream. He folded the letter and the slip of paper and stuck him in his wallet. Then he put the thousand dollar bill in another one of the Pachappa's envelopes, sealed it, wrote the name *Tony Jordan* on it, put it back in the tin can, put the can in the safe, locked the safe, locked the safe and then went back to the desk. He picked up the phone, dialed.

"This is the Pachappa Hotel," he said, putting a little urgency into his voice. "Give me Homicide." He waited for a clicking sound, then, "Lonnie Stone at the Pachappa. We've just found a stiff in one of the rooms."

**L**ONNIE STONE smiled a tight little smile. The man across the masonite counter in the Library room of the *Buffalo Eagle* didn't smile back. The man was wearing a black visor over old and weak and watery blue eyes that looked like they had seen lots of things too many times.

Lonnie said: "Digging for a syndicate feature story, Dad. Thought maybe you could help me."

The watery old blue eyes didn't change expression. "Syndicate?"

"Yeah. Southwestern Alliance."

The watery old eyes looked suddenly vague. "There ain't no such syndicate."

Lonnie grinned. "Wasn't very slick, was it, Dad?"

"Like sandpaper on a boil."

"Yeah," said Lonnie. He brought up a tight fist, put it on top of the masonite, held it tightly closed for an instant. Then he splayed his fingers suddenly and disclosed a crumpled green wad nestling in the palm of his hand.

The washed-out eyes stared fixedly.

Lonnie said, "A boat, Dad. Maybe a

sailing boat of some sort, called the *Black Swan*. Maybe stuck on a sand bar hereabouts. Maybe a long time ago. Maybe just recent."

"That's quite a lot of maybes, mister."

"Quite a lot. But I figure if anybody knows, it would be you. I figure you've been with the Eagle ever since the days of the first movable type."

The watery old eyes came up slowly. Then they suddenly crinkled. "That's pretty good, mister. That's better than they have on television, sometimes. Don't move for a couple minutes."

Lonnie grinned. "Take your time, Dad."

The old man moved away from the masonite, went behind a row of huge metal bins. A door opened in the rear of the room, closed again. A few minutes later the door reopened, re-closed. Shuffling steps came back to the masonite.

Lonnie watched the old man stare fixedly once again at the green wad still in his outstretched palm.

"Just gotta be a boat, huh?" the old man asked.

"What else could be stuck on a sand bar, Dad? With a name like that?"

"Yeah. That's true." He sighed a long drawn out sigh, never once taking his eyes from the green wad. "Just out of curiosity, what is it?"

Lonnie unfolded the green wad. "A sawbuck, Dad."

The sigh became even more drawn out. "The root of all evil," he croaked. "My, how I'd like to plant some of them roots someday before I pass to the great beyond."

"Nothing, huh, Dad?"

"All of that. And then some."

Lonnie glared into the old blue eyes. "Dammit, are you sure?"

"As sure as I can be. However—" he shrugged bony, narrow shoulders—"we here ain't infallible, you know. We could be wrong. Now if it was me, and if it was important enough, I'd go nosin' around the waterfront. Some real old codgers hang

out around the waterfront. Then mebbe I'd start usin' my head a little and go direct to the Marine Registry Office like I should of done in the first place."

Lonnie suddenly grinned, pushed the wrinkled note across the masonite. "Plant this, Dad," he said. "I can see you've got a real green thumb."

**T**H E girl pushed at the filing cabinet she'd been bending down over. The drawer closed with a bang. "No," she said decisively. "No ship of that name ever cleared this port."

Lonnie gripped the edge of the table that separated them. "Was there," he asked grimly, "A boat registered here that maybe didn't ever clear the port?"

The girl sighed. "Look! It's five fifteen and I've got eight hours work to crowd into the next couple of minutes, and it's people like you that—"

Lonnie nodded. "Okay, okay. But here's what I mean. Was there a boat registered here that went down in a storm? A boat named the *Black Swan*. Maybe a sailing ship."

The girl smiled one of those smiles you walk quickly away from. "I'm quite sure the records would show it," she said sweetly to Lonnie. "If there had ever been. But it's not in the records, and they really go back quite a way. Back to the fire, in fact."

"Fire?"

"When the British burned the city several generations ago, or was it the French and Indians? My History is a little rusty this evening."

Lonnie's lip curled. "Very very funny," he snarled. He slammed out of the office. A joker. And they pay dames like that to insult the customers.

It wasn't far to the waterfront; Lonnie's nose could tell that. Odors of burned oil; the cacophonous stink of mixed decaying fruits and vegetables; the general smell of tired freighters at dock, with now and then the illusive scent of a refugee breeze fresh

in off the long waters, it was a stale fog of a thing that lay on the area like an unwashed blanket on an invalid's bed.

Lonnie snorted, turned a corner and went west. It was dark now. The street suddenly narrowed like walking into a funnel. This way led to the docks.

Old concrete warehouses huddled close together, scrawled obscenities littering their rough surfaces about shoulder height.

The warehouses ended abruptly leaving nothing but a few scattered places between them and the water. Lonnie could hear it now, lapping sloppily against dock pilings. He wondered if they had a breakwall of some sort out there. And then nothing else but the almost endlessly long piers and unloading docks with freighters parked diagonally like cars around a supermarket. Nothing else but an old leaning frame building with boarded-over windows and a creaking wooden sign that stuck out over the slate sidewalk. Lonnie looked up at the sign.

#### SNUG HARBOR HOTEL

He spat. The building inside would be full of dirt and filth and cobweb-like memories. And nothing else. He went around it, spied a watchman's shanty a few yards down.

Lonnie opened the door. "Hi," he said.

It was a young man seated at a rough wooden table and he had a pile of detective magazines in front of him. Not a "real old codger" but a young man. The young man was looking up.

"Reporter," said Lonnie. "*Buffalo Eagle*. Just nosing around for a story."

The young man sighed. "Yeah? Don't you birds ever get tired writing up stuff about our 'romantic waterfront'?" He held up a finger and thumb to his nose. "Guy down here not six months ago with a pix man. And now you."

Lonnie let a tight, almost anxious grin play around his lips. "Not quite the same," he said. "Information only, this time."

"Oh. Fire away."

"This is about a boat. Maybe a sailing vessel. Maybe a long long time ago, or maybe just recent." He stopped, remembering. A lot of maybes, the old man at the newspaper had said. He went on: "This tub was named the *Black Swan*. I figure maybe there was this storm came up, see? And maybe the old scow couldn't take it anymore. Maybe she foundered on a sand bar somewhere around here."

"Hey, that's real good," said the young man.

Lonnie stared. "What's real good?"

"Why, the story! That's real romantic."

"This *happened!*" Lonnie snapped.

"Huh?"

"I want to know when and where. Mostly where."

The young man shook his head. "You've disappointed me. I like stories. You've disappointed me, old boy."

Lonnie bent down over the young man, put his face six inches from the face of the other. "Tell it," he said huskily.

"There ain't nothin' to tell. If you're talking about a boat, uh-uh. There was never no scow named the *Black Swan*. And she never was in a storm around here. And she never foundered on a sand bar around here. And if there had been and she was, then she couldn't have anyhow, 'cause there ain't no sand bars on the American side, which makes it in the first place and in the second place, and in the third place on account of in the first place. Get me?"

Lonnie's lips peeled back. He balled a fist and shoved it under the young man's chin.

"Look, wise guy! If you don't want this rammed down your guts you'd better can the guff! *Where is that boat?*"

It shook the young man like a zephyr shakes Mount Wilson. The only change in him was a queer look in his eyes which he held for an instant before looking down at the watch on his left wrist. He said quietly: "In a few seconds if I don't start cranking

up them time clocks about a dozen A.D.T. boys and half a dozen prowlers are gonna come barrelin' down here so fast it'll be surprising. But surprising, I really mean, mister."

Lonnie began to curse, and the young man laughed at him.

"Yeah, yeah. You and my mother-in-law. Only she never *quite* gets around to saying it out loud. Scram!"

**L**ONNIE STONE sat on the edge of the bed and glared down at the slip of paper in his hand.

*Black Swan—on board—sand bar  
Fifty thousand cash*

He cursed, crumpled the paper and flung it at a wastebasket over near the room's writing desk. Even being stinking the night before hadn't cleared his mind, the thing was still a question mark with a leering, just-out-of-reach dollar sign behind that.

Somebody was wrong, damned dead wrong, and the sickening sensation that it was him pervaded the room.

He clawed for his trousers on the end of the bed, got his wallet, got out the letter from *Angela* and read it through. Nothing. You'd think there'd be a hint at least—but nothing.

Forty minutes later he was standing on the cement walk looking up at an old fashioned house that bore the number 1745. It was an old, homestead sort of place with painted gray wooden steps that led up to a gingerbread verandah from the walk.

He jabbed at a white porcelain bell button set into an inverted cup of wood. Somewhere inside the house he could hear a brat bawling.

The girl who opened the door was youthful, maybe five years younger than Lonnie. Her skin was pale and dusty like Calla lilies in a florist's window. She had black eyes and soft black hair. She looked like the Mexican girls who pose for those tour-

ist pictures—only she was prettier. He decided she must be Italian.

"I'm Lonnie Stone," he said. "Like to talk to Angela Jordan."

"Please come in." She had a nice voice, soft like the softness of her black lustrous hair. He followed her in.

She turned and faced him. Her eyes were inquiring now. "Angela Jordan? She isn't here, didn't you know? If there is something I can do . . . ?"

Lonnie cursed inwardly. Damn this thing! Every turn he made! *All right, then, sister, if you want it the hard way.* . . .

"Tony Jordan's dead," he almost snarled.

The girl's eyes widened incredibly. She didn't gasp, she didn't cry out. Just her eyes, just her black fathomless eyes. She said softly, like on a spent breath:

"Dead?"

Somewhere within the house the same brat bawled again only it was very very faint this time as though somebody had closed a few doors on it.

"Somebody put a slug through him, sister."

The girl jerked a little like the jerking of a dog after it's been run over. Lonnie scowled at her. She finally said:

"Will you come? Mama mia will have to be told."

Lonnie started to say, "Hey!" but it was too late, the girl was already gone, taking a bannistered staircase to the left of the doorway.

They went down a long second floor hallway, through a room. Through another room. Lonnie suddenly learned where the sound of the crying child had come from.

In a leather covered rocker before a tall, round-topped quartered window was an old white-haired and wrinkled woman and in her arms was a small child. She was holding the child close, whispering huskily to it. She looked up. The child had stopped whimpering.

Obviously not Jordan's wife. This old bag was in her sixties.

"Mama mia," said the girl. She broke into a flood of swiftly moving Italian. Then she stopped, turned to Lonnie. "I have told Mama mia you know Tony. Mama understands a little but it is better this way."

Lonnie almost jumped. His lips formed to say, "Hey!" and then stayed open. He gulped. The old woman was watching him, waiting, expectant. He gulped again, nodded a little, said weakly:

"Yeah. Tony and me're friends."

The old lady whispered something. The girl smiled, turned to Lonnie. "He is a good boy, Tony. Mama says he is a good boy. You know?"

"Yeah."

Speech came thinly from the lips of the old woman. It was a lonely sound in Lonnie's ears. It reminded him of a moaning wind in forgotten mountain passes back home.

The girl was still looking at him. "I will put little Tony to bed now. You will stay and tell me? So I can tell Mama mia after?"

The black eyes again. Damn the lousy black eyes. He said, "*Adios, Señora,*" to the old woman. He felt like a jerk doing it. He went out in the hall, went down the staircase.

**H**ER eyes were red-rimmed when she came back to him. She said: "I am Marie Gordolano. Tony's sister. You understand this is our family name—but Jordan we call it now."

Lonnie said nothing.

"You didn't know Tony." It was sudden, like a slap in the face. "You are of the Nevada Police."

He nodded. "All right, sister. The Police. Yeah." One more lie meant nothing.

The girl's eyes flooded. She began to cry softly—almost soundlessly—in the manner of some of these women. "I couldn't tell Mama mia! With Angela gone and the baby always sick . . . and now this. I

just couldn't bring myself to tell her!"

Lonnie's hands began to itch. Every turn. Every stinking damned turn in this lousy rat race. . . . He glared at the girl's black hair; at the tears misting over the deep black eyes.

He pulled out the letter, shoved it at the girl. "When did she write this?"

"She . . . she didn't. I wrote it. I signed Angela's name to it. I thought maybe Tony would change his mind about the divorce."

Lonnie's eyes slitted. "And the dame—this Angela?"

"She used to work at the *Black Swan* with Tony, but we haven't seen her in a long time. And now Tony. . . ." The words trailed off into a wail that shook the small shoulders.

But Lonnie was not one to be interested in small shoulders. His eyes were tight hard knots now. He crushed his right fist into his left palm and took a step nearer the girl.

"You just said something, sister," he whispered. "Something I've been waiting a long long time to hear. This *Black Swan*." The name rolled almost lovingly off his lips. "This *Black Swan*," he repeated.

He had to wait a moment though. The girl's hands were at her face now, holding tight to something, trying to dam back tears that wouldn't be stopped. He let it lay there an instant.

Then: "This *Black Swan*." He took a deep breath. "It was a night spot?"

The girl nodded.

"I might have known," he said softly. "If my head had been nailed on nice and tight I would have known." He pulled away from the girl. "Okay, sister. That's what I needed to know." He turned, headed for the door.

"The Mama mia! What will I tell Mama mia?" Her eyes were big black question marks.

He turned, sighed, grunted through his teeth. "That's something you gotta hold onto tight, sister. Nobody but you can

squeeze a thing like that . . . and even then there's no telling what comes out." The door slammed behind him.

He went to the corner, waited for a crusing cab. It wasn't until he was headed for downtown again that he realized he still clutched the letter signed *Angela*. He folded it and stuffed it in his wallet.

**T**HET old man in the Library room of the *Buffalo Eagle* looked as if he hadn't moved an inch since the day after the Chicago Fire.

Lonnie walked over to the masonite counter. "The machine I was feeding had all lemons, Dad. That *Black Swan* wasn't a scow at all. It's a night spot."

"I know." The old watery eyes held no expression.

"You *know*? Why the hell didn't you tell me?"

An old eyebrow raised over an old eye. "You were a mite insistent. I remember you asking me what else but a boat could be stuck on a sand bar. What else with a name like that, you said."

"Yeah. Yeah. Well I've took the cure. And I've got another sawbuck, Dad."

The old eyes tightened, looked over Lonnie's shoulder and out the window. They seemed to be studying something out there. Finally:

"This *Black Swan* is a gambling dive. First floor dancing and drinking and such minor vices. But upstairs all very quiet, all very secret, all very put away . . . roulette or craps or what would your dear little heart desire?"

"I thought. And now the big one. A guy named Tony Jordan and his wife *Angela*."

"Oh. Them two. Well, there's a story that Jordan and a big fat slob named Carl Filetta were partners in the thing. *Angela* was the come-on-dearie-this-one's-the-charm girl. But it seems the trio broke up. Jordan was plenty jealous, and word got around Jordan frowned on the way *Angela* don't scream and slap Filetta's face every

time he made goo-goo eyes at her. And then about a month ago they say he sold out his share of the *Black Swan* to this Filetta. They say."

"Jordan's dead," said Lonnlie.

"We all pass on, it seems."

"And Angela's disappeared."

"Tch, tch."

Lonnlie ran a hand nervously through his hair. "It's laying down smooth, Dad. Not a wrinkle in it. And it's worth more than a sawbuck." He reached for his wallet.

The old man held up a restraining hand. He brought the old watery eyes in from the window, let them rest on Lonnlie's.

"I'm an old duffer, son," he said softly. "Used to be what the movies call a crack reporter. For a long long time. I was so good that now they keep me on handling this library crap out of sentiment. Lucky, that's me. And yet?" He leaned over on the masonite, squinted hard at Lonnlie. "And yet, just one more tiny scoop to tuck under my belt would do me a world of good—an old duffer like me, son."

Lonnlie grinned, shook his head.

"Nothing in it, huh?"

"From here I can't see a damned thing, Dad."

The old eyes looked thoughtful and far away and wistful. "I never could win nothing playing the ponies, neither," he said.

**T**HREE was a big neon atop a squat building whose front was covered with jet black glass blocks that sparkled like jewels. The neon was shaped like a huge letter "S" and could have been intended to resemble a swan.

Lonnlie grunted and pushed through a port-holed door. It was early, the place was deserted. There was a low ceiling, quite low. There was a dance floor tucked in the shadows to the left. White covered tables. A band shell. To the right was a long mahogany bar.

And one lone, solitary bartender. The bartender was studying a racing form and

sipping occasionally at a glass of beer.

"Umm," he grunted.

"Beer," said Lonnlie.

The bartender looked up, looked down. He drew one, pushed it across the bar. He went back to the racing form.

"How's Angela these days?"

"Huh?" The bartender's head bobbed up. His eyes were loaded.

"How's Carl? Tony, even? How's everybody?"

The bartender pushed up from the racing form, said "'Scuse me," and shuffled off down behind the bar toward a door marked *men*. Lonnlie watched him. At the last moment he turned abruptly, went swiftly through another door that had no marking on it at all. The door squeaked a little as it swung to behind him.

Lonnlie drank some of the beer. He looked down at the bar. It was a long thing, a divided thing. The longer portion was used for the great cult of the elbow benders. The smaller seemed to be a snack bar of some sort. Lonnlie stared hard at that.

The door opened again. The man coming through was huge and dark skinned and had lips in his face that looked like undone kidney stew. His movements, for a fat man, were about as noisy as a black narcissus growing.

"Looking for somebody, guy?"

"I wondered how Angela was." The squeaky door swung outward and the bartender came back and shuffled behind the bar again. He didn't look at Lonnlie.

"I'm Carl Filetta," said the man in front of Lonnlie. "You a friend of Angela's?"

"Of the family."

The fat man's eyes studied Lonnlie. His breathing was even, unhurried. It made his huge stomach move slowly in and out.

"He ast for Tony," said the bartender suddenly.

The fat man stiffened. His eyes became sharp, slitted things in folds of flesh. "What about Tony, guy?"

Lonnlie shrugged, put a tight smile at the

corners of his mouth. "I said I was a friend of the family."

"You said Angela's family."

"Husband and wife," said Lonnie. "I might be wondering only, mightn't I?"

That made the huge man grunt. "You might. You might also go up to the house—you ought to know where that is—and you might ring the bell and when Angela answers you might say, 'Hello Angela, how are you?' You might do all that, guy, and you might not even get killed doing it."

Lonnie said nothing.

The fat man dug in a pocket of his suit coat and came out with five silver dollars which he began slowly shuffling from one huge hand to another. "You might do all that," he repeated.

Lonnie stared. His right hand bunched itself. "Since when," he said slowly, "are they using silver dollars here in the East?"

"Hey, Boss!" yelled the bartender.

Strangely, the fat man wasn't moved. Rather, an oily grin formed around the puffy lips. He took a silent step toward Lonnie. Then another. "Talk, you slob!" he said thickly. "The dough wasn't on him. Where'd Tony have it?"

"Boss!" yelled the bartender warningly.

Lonnie lashed out with the bunched right fist and let the fat man have it directly in the middle of his stomach.

The fat man wasn't stopped. He came in, this time not stepping, but charging like a great and maddened bull, his huge right fist curled around the five silver dollars. He lunged the right in a sweeping arc.

Lonnie banged against the side of the bar getting out of the way of it. He whirled, cracked his wrist down in a rabbit punch on the fat man's neck. The fat man grunted and came to a halt. He shook his head twice, called Lonnie a name—the same name—twice, and came charging back in.

Lonnie lifted one of the chairs that were grouped around the nearest white covered table. He swung it up, back, forward, let go of it.

For a huge man, he could move fast—Lonnie had to give him that. The chair flew to one side of him, cleared the top of the bar, almost pinned the sloppy bartender as he ducked, finally stopped against the bar mirror.

The bar mirror came down in splinters around the bartender.

The fat man had him half against the bar. Lonnie saw it coming, tried rolling with it. The blow backed by five heavy silver dollars twisted his head like pulling the string on a top. He went down, fed the chrome bar rail with the side of his mouth.

IT SEEMED like years. Lonnie knew he was shaking his head, trying to get his eyes to focus. It seemed like years but of course it wasn't. It was only while the fat man got his balance back and, leaning over, came down after him.

Lonnie kicked him and made him come down faster. He got to his knees, got the fat man by the hair, took five crushing blows of the fat fists in his face before he noticed garlic coming in greasy waves from undone kidney stew lips and felt the dead weight of a monstrous body lying on his left ankle . . . before he stopped pumping the pulpy head up and down against the corner of the long mahogany bar.

He got slowly up then. Got up wiping blood from his mouth and feeling with his tongue on jagged broken teeth inside his mouth. Got up and looked straight into the big front sight of a Colt target .22 pointed at his heart.

The bartender was holding it in his right hand and with his left he was making nervous swipes at a twitching mouth.

Lonnie tried to grin. "That's fine," he said thickly. "That's just fine. You pull the trigger and I go down and guess who winds up in a big blaze of glory with your prints all over a gun that burned down a guy named Tony Jordan in a two-by-four hotel room in Reno, Nevada."

The gun hand began to waver. The bartender looked down at the fat man, looked up at Lonnie. "It wasn't me, wise guy."

"Yeah? Only the police aren't fussy. And they won't know it was him. And they sure as hell won't believe you . . . and I won't be around to tell 'em different."

Lonnie could feel the sweat coming down his cheeks, filtering into his mouth, burning hot on the cut places.

"And Angela," said Lonnie. "She's dead, too. Or didn't you know that? But what's one more? They only gas you once. In a little chamber all to yourself with eyes looking in. Or do they burn you here in New York? Funny, I never looked that up."

The bartender said, "Cripes," and looked like he wanted to throw up. He looked down at the trembling gun, let it fall from his stiffening fingers and said, "Cripes," again.

Lonnie sighed. He bent down, got the gun by the butt, looked almost regretfully at the man before him. "I'm sorry, guy," he said. "Damned if I'm not." He brought up the gun, slammed the big front sight down on the bartender's forehead. The man crumpled.

After that it was easy. It had to be; you can't be wrong all the time. He stared at the smaller of the two mahogany bars, seeing in his mind again the nine fascinating words on a small slip of paper.

Yeah. *Black Swan*. On a board. The sandwich bar of an illegal gambling dive known as the *Black Swan*.

He went around behind the snack bar, looked down into a cupboard like space filled with stacks of dishes, paper napkins, silverware. The thing was a storage space. He took them out one by one until it was empty. Then he struck a match and stuck his head inside and looked around.

There was a short section of two-by-four with one single nail through its center, driven into and suspended by the under part of the bartop itself. He yanked at

it, pulled it down. Pierced by the nail was a half inch thick layer of green bills that were attached to the wood.

He stuffed the wad inside his shirt, went over, locked the front door of the place and then hunted till he found a phone. He called the Library Room of the *Buffalo Eagle*, smiling to himself.

"The lemon king, Dad," he said. "At the *Black Swan*. Best you get somebody to lift you into your wheel chair and push you out here quick. There's a scoop but it won't keep."

After that, he called Police Headquarters.

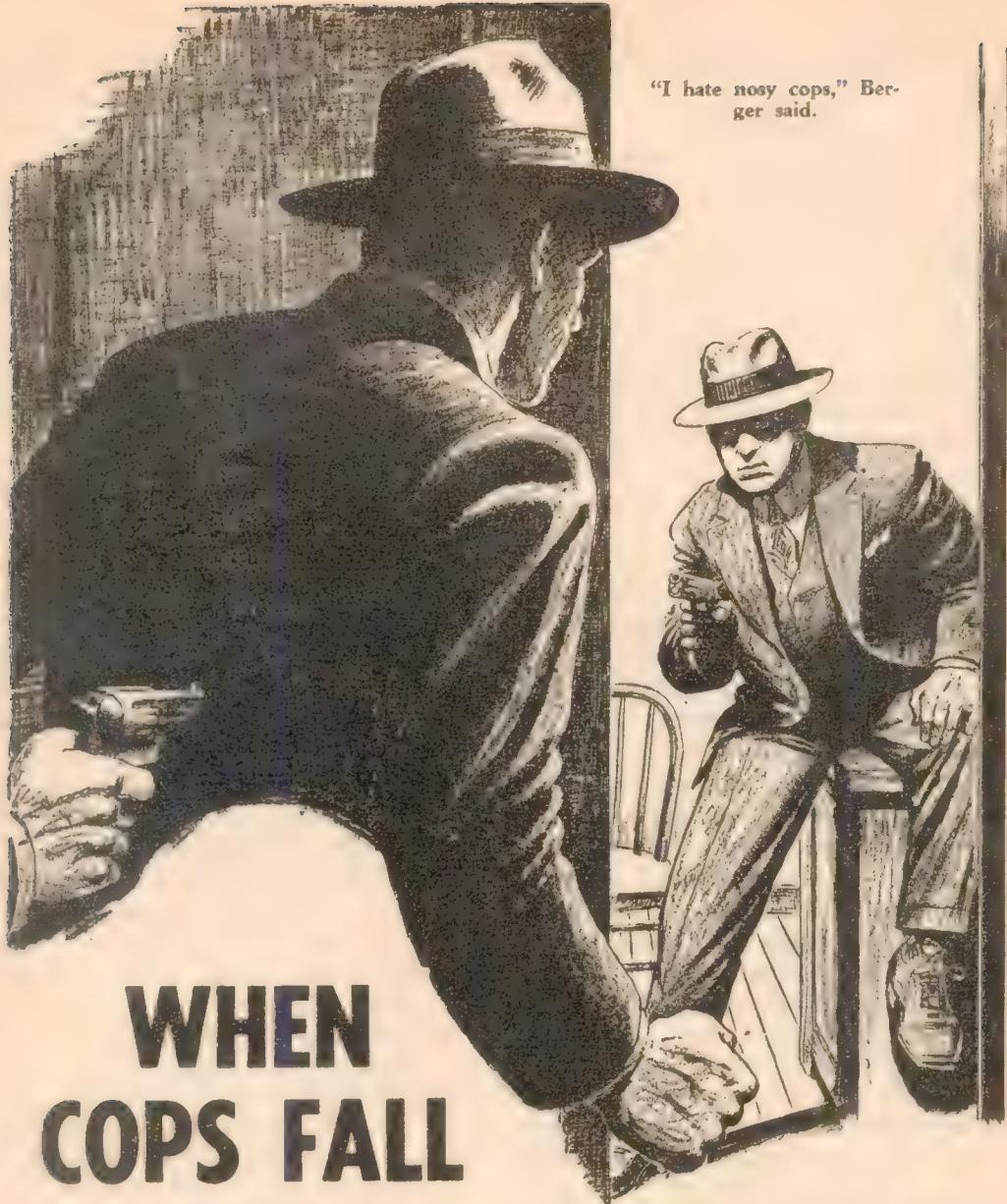
**L**ONNIE STONE stood on the verandah of the house on New Argo Street. He punched a white porcelain button and waited for the girl.

How do you tell a girl her brother killed his own wife out of jealousy for his partner? And then went off to Reno to get a divorce from a dead dame so it would look good in case they ever found the body? And how do you say, you'd better wise up the Mama mia that Filetta followed her son and knocked him off because he'd emptied the till before he headed West?

Or how would you say when the baby grows up you'd better slip it to him about his dad knocking off his mom? But there's a silver lining, kiddo. Twenty-five grand for you—of course I took a little cut for my trouble—and now that you're loaded go on out and buy yourself a backyard full of Cadillacs.

The door swung open and the girl stood before him, not saying anything to him, just standing there, staring in shock at his puffed cheek, at the cut and purpled places around his mouth. Staring at him with those—those damned lovely black eyes of hers.

Lonnie sighed and said softly: "Maybe we'd better go in and sit down, Beautiful. For the first couple of minutes this'll be rough." ♦ ♦ ♦



# WHEN COPS FALL OUT

By LARRY HOLDEN

—The dreams of the mob come true. There's nothing to prevent them from taking the town apart—while Officers Sweeny and Evans hunt for each other's blood!

"I hate nosy cops," Berger said.

SWEENY was waiting his turn to bowl when one of the Boy Scouts from the troop that was practicing knots and wig-wag in another part of the church basement walked up beside him and gave a little apologetic cough to announce himself.

"There's a fella outside asking for you,

Mr. Sweeney," he said eagerly. "He looks like a stool pidgeon."

Sweeny grinned at the boy. "And he'd probably be selling tickets to the fireman's ball. Take my roll for me, Father?"

The young priest who had been watching the game nodded and smiled, "It's about time somebody asked me to play."

Sweeny touseled the boy's hair and started up the stairs. He was a big man and walked heavily. The man was in the alley at the basement entrance, skinny, furtive.

"You want to see me?" Sweeny asked shortly.

The little man bobbed and smirked. "You're Sweeny, the cop?"

"So?"

"And your side partner is Micky Evans that you smacked in the snoot two days ago back of Headquarters?"

Sweeny's broad face tightened. Word sure got around fast in this town. He hadn't meant to smack Micky, but the Mick was drunk and wanted to go in and tell the Chief off, for some reason or other. Sweeny had to clip him to keep him out of Headquarters, and the Mick had lost two front teeth. Sweeny hadn't meant to hit him that hard, but he was the strongest man on the Force and sometimes it got away from him. That was two days ago, and the Mick hadn't shown since.

"What about it?" he demanded.

"Nothin', pal, nothin'. Just thought you like to know that Mick Evans is out on the town askin' for trouble. He's half lit and lookin' for Berger with a gun. Nice, huh?"

Sweeny gasped. Berger was a racket-man, up to his ears in North Newark vice, and the Mick hated him like poison. Mick had been building a case against him for a long time, now, picking up a little here and a little there. But the Mick wasn't patient. It was just like him to pop his wig and go looking for Berger—and half lit, at that.

Sweeny made a grab for the little man, who dodged nimbly and scurried back a few yards.

"Yah, you dumb cop!" There was spite and venom in his voice. "I do you a favor and you make a pass at me. The hell with you!" He turned and scurried up the alley.

Sweeny clenched his granite fists, then turned and plodded back to the basement of the church. He knew who the little man was now. He was called Vince the Jockey, though he had never been closer to a horse than a bookie's handbook.

"I gotta go now," he said thickly to nobody in particular. "I gotta find Mick Evans."

The young priest gave him a troubled glance, then gently taking his elbow, drew him aside from the other men. "What's the matter, my boy?" he asked. "You look angry."

"I just gotta find Mick Evans, that's all." Sweeny was too much of a cop to tell even the priest about Berger. The Mick didn't want anybody to know he was working on Berger.

The priest laid his hand on Sweeny's arm and looked earnestly into his face. "Not to fight with him again, Martin? Not to fight with him again?"

"Oh no, Father. Nothin' like that. I . . . just gotta find him."

"Promise me?"

"I promise, Father."

"You're a good boy, Martin. Don't get in trouble."

Sweeny smiled weakly. Trouble. That was one thing this night was going to be full of unless he got out there fast. Berger was trouble— squat, blond, pale-eyed trouble. Tough and ruthless.

The priest patted Sweeny's thick iron forearm and walked back to the other men. They watched silently when Sweeny pounded up the steps again, swinging into his coat. Then they turned back to their game, and most of them were frowning.

**S**WEENEY drove out to the North Newark section, Berger's backyard. He stopped at the first ginmill he came to and

walked quickly inside. He wasted no words. "Mick Evans been in here tonight?"

The bartender pursed his lips and wiped the bar with a great air of concentration. "Micky Evans? Ain't seen him, Sweeny. This is his offnight, ain't it? Something come up?"

"Never mind what come up. Look, if he turns up, tell him I wanna see him. Tell him to meet me in the alley outside St. Mary's Church."

The bartender nodded very thoughtfully and kept his eyes on the bar rag. "I'll do that," he said. "Sure. In the alley?"

Sweeny suddenly realized how that had sounded and he flushed. "At the church," he said shortly, and walked out.

He had never realized before how many ginmills there were in North Newark. There were pizzerias, there were fish-and-chip places, there were chop suey houses, clubs, bars, taverns, joints—but they were all ginmills.

He walked in and out of five of them before he realized that they were clamping up on him.

"Seen Mick Evans tonight?"

"Ain't been in here, Sweeny."

Another ginmill, another face. "Mick Evans been in here tonight, Tony?"

"Not tonight, Sweeny. Maybe he's down the Shamrock. The Mick, he likes the fish and chips. Try the Shamrock?"

A thick, hostile silence fell when Sweeny plodded into the Shamrock. This was a tough crowd, Scotch-Irish, and they watched with thin eyes when Sweeny walked in. Sweeny knew right away that they had heard the story of how he had pasted Micky Evans that night behind Headquarters, and he knew what they were thinking.

The Mick was a lean, compact man, but he didn't weigh an ounce over a hundred forty-five. Sweeny was two hundred and ten, thick-muscled and as powerful as they came. In a knock-down-drag-out, Sweeny could take a dozen like the Mick. These

Scotch-Irish were a prizefight gang, and when it came to a fight, they liked to see the men evenly matched. In their eyes, Sweeny was nothing but a bully, clouting a man smaller and lighter than himself. However, they did not say a word. There wasn't a single one of them who wanted to tangle with Sweeny, but the glances they knifed at him were bitter and contemptuous. Sweeny felt his face grow fiery as he crossed the floor to the bar.

The barkeep was a mild-appearing, white-haired old fraud, who kept order in his bar with two feet of garden hose stuffed with sand and plugged. He came down the bar and flapped a puffy white hand at two young toughs who looked as if they were making up their minds to jump Sweeny together.

"Scram," he said. "Scram, or I'll lather the pair of you with the hose." He drew Sweeny down to the now deserted end of the bar. "You'd be looking for Mick Evans now, wouldn't you, Sweeny?"

"What're you building up to, an argument?"

The barkeep looked reproachfully at him, turned and plucked a bottle of Old Bish-mills and two glasses from the back bar. "I'm breakin' one of me strictest rules," he said, filling the glasses. "Drinkin' durin' workin' hours. But this is what you might call in the nature of a crisis."

"I don't want a drink."

"You'll drink with me, me boy, or I'll tell you nothin'. But let me put somethin' to you first, Sweeny-boy. When members of the Police Department start fightin' and brawlin' and pokin' each other in the snoot amongst themselves, where's that leave the rest of us defenseless citizens? Anarchy, that's what it'll come to, Sweeny, anarchy. They'll be robbin' and killin' and fightin' in the streets, the next thing you know. Just what, Sweeny me boy, have you got against Mick Evans?"

"I don't have a damn thing against him! All I want to do is find him!"

"Sure. Sure you do. And then what? Lookit the face on you. You're wearing a scowl as black as ten feet up the Devil's chimblly. You're on the prod, me boy, and don't try to tell me diff'rint."

Sweeny clenched his jaws and prayed. All these people were the Mick's friends—and they weren't going to tell him where the Mick was. They were going to protect the Mick if they could.

Protect him!

"Listen. . . ." he pleaded.

The barkeep's eyes turned icy. He started away. "Go home, Sweeny," he said over his shoulder. "Go home and don't make trouble."

Sweeny's temper broke out of sheer frustration and he shouted, "Go to hell!" and walked out.

**H**E WAS no more than ten feet outside the door when two men darted from the neighboring doorway, leaping at him. Sweeny half turned and threw up his arm, but he was a fraction slow. The blackjack caught him on the side of the head. The whole night wheeled in streaming constellations, and the street up-ended like a plank broken in the middle. He felt himself seized by either arm and hustled across the sidewalk toward the car at the curb.

Before they could thrust him through the yawning rear door, he planted his thick-thewed legs and wrenched one arm free, sending that man staggering against the car. Still dazed, Sweeny swung his arm and caught the other man across the face with a ringing open-palm slap. The man made a shrill whinnying sound and pranced back three paces, darting his right hand under the lapel of his coat. Sweeny plunged blindly at him, swinging both long arms.

He felt his fist hit something hard, and saw a figure go reeling and flailing across the sidewalk and crash into a row of garbage cans twenty feet away. The man went down, kicking wildly, then scrambled to his hands and knees and, still on all fours, fled

out into the street like a panic-stricken animal.

Sweeny swung around as the car motor roared into life behind him. The car shot from the curb. It passed the fleeing man, who bleated feebly after it. He lurched down the street, waving his arms. The car stopped and a door swung open. The man plunged headlong into it, and the car picked up speed and roared around the corner.

Sweeny swore and bent down heavily to pick up his hat, which had been knocked to the sidewalk by the blackjack. He slapped it against his thigh.

There was a panic growing in him, and his mind wouldn't work. He knew he had to get to Mick Evans before Berger did. But how, *how?* Nobody would tell him anything. And now he was sure that Berger knew Mick Evans was out after him, and that he, Sweeny, was out after the Mick to keep things from happening.

Then another staggering thought hit him. The Mick was one of those black brooding Irishmen. Could it be that the Mick was setting this whole thing up to get him beat up in return for that poke in the jaw Sweeny had given him? Beat up or worse. The Mick was a wild man when he got going. Sweeny felt a great unhappiness settle over him. Before that unfortunate but necessary poke in the jaw, the Mick and he had been the best of friends. . . .

He jammed his hat on his head and drove around the corner to the next ginmill. It was there that two precinct detectives picked him up. Flannery and Elwood. They approached him warily when he got out of the car. It was Flannery who spoke while Elwood stood a little to one side, looking ready to jump in if Sweeny turned nasty.

"Hi, Sweeny," said Flannery cautiously.

Sweeny growled an inarticulate greeting, sucking at his skinned knuckles.

"Hear you're looking for Mick Evans," Flannery said. "That a fact?"

"Yeah. Seen him?"

"Matter of fact, we did. He was around

about an hour ago a little lit. I tried to get him to go home, but he was on his way to Hoboken. The Old Clam Broth House, I think he said. He felt like steamed clams. That was an hour ago."

Sweeny said heavily, "You're a liar. The Mick never touched a clam in his life. He called them ginders on the half shell. If you seen him, tell me for Pete's sake. I'm not kidding around."

"I'm telling you," Flannery's voice turned hard. "Mick Evans went to Hoboken. I don't know what you got on your mind, but why don't you go home and sleep on it? You'll feel better in the morning. Be a good guy and don't give us any trouble."

Sweeny saw Elwood edge around a little more to his left, and he sprang back. This was something tangible, this was something he could deal with.

"What's on *your* mind?" he snarled. "Thinking of taking me in maybe, or something?"

Flannery stood tense, then with a hopeless gesture, waved Elwood back. There weren't any three men on the Force who could take Sweeny when he was expecting it. Not without using those weapons the city had put in their pockets, and they didn't want to go that far.

"Okay," said Flannery, "we'll keep an eye out for the Mick. But will you do me a favor, Sweeny?"

"Sure. I'm not making trouble."

"Give me your gun."

Sweeny's jaw went slack. He had not expected that—but he knew he was going to have to give up his gun or they'd put in a riot call, and then the fat would be in the fire. This was Berger's ward and he had precinct pipelines. Sweeny handed over his gun. If they made a serious effort to take him in, he was going to have to tell them about the Mick and Berger—and that's all Berger would need. Just a whisper. Only four days ago, the Mick had gloated over the fact that he was getting

close; in another week he'd have a case to give to the D.A.

**B**LEAKLY, Sweeny watched Flannery and Elwood climb back into their car and drive away. He took a breath and walked doggedly toward the ginnill before which he had parked. He glanced inside and stopped short. He stood beside the doorway and waited.

It was ten minutes before Vince the Jockey came swaggering out. For once in his life, Sweeny moved fast. He was on Vince before the skinny little man could do more than utter a reedy squeak. He gathered Vince's zooty jacketfront in his big hand, lifted him a full foot from the sidewalk and jammed him back against the side of the building. Vince's narrow face was contorted with terror. His arms and legs worked jerkily like those of a jiggled puppet. His mouth opened and closed, but he could not make a sound.

"Now where's Berger?" Sweeny demanded. "Give it to me straight or I'll slap the face off you!"

Vince squealed and tried to shield his face with his matchstick arms. Sweeny slapped, sweeping aside that flimsy defense with the broad of his hand. Vince cried out like a woman.

"You know too much," said Sweeny grimly, "and you don't tell enough. Where'd you get all this stuff about Mick Evans goin' after Berger?"

Vince babbled, "I heard it, that's all, Sweeny. I just heard it around."

"Where?"

"Down the Shamrock, for one...."

"You're a liar!" Sweeny lifted his hand again.

Vince jerked convulsively and mewled. "Honest to God, Sweeny. Berger left the Shamrock a half hour ago, and now he's down his garage on Wakeman Street near the railroad station. If Mick Evans turns up there, he's gonna blast him. And he'll get away with it, too!" Vince spat vicious-

ly. "Everybody knows Mick Evans been gunnin' for him all night. There's a million witnesses."

Sweeny felt something lift in his heart. He tightened his grip on the jacket and lifted Vince another easy six inches against the wall.

"Where's this garage?"

"Wakeman street."

"Where on Wakeman Street?"

"The Acme Garage and Repair Shop. It's kind of up a driveway behind a yellow house. . . ."

"You know where it is."

"I just told you—"

"You taking me. Right now."

"No, Sweeny, no, no! Berger'll give it to me sure if I take you. It's easy to find. . . ."

"You'll take me!"

Vince's eyes glinted in mink-like savagery. "All right, I'll take you. But it'll cost you a sawbuck. Don't think you can slap me around without it costing you. Gimme a sawbuck and I'll take you."

Sweeny fought down the desire to slap the rat-like face in front of him, and he lowered Vince gently to the sidewalk as if he were something very fragile and precious. If this was something he had to do to get Mick out of the mess, it was something he had to do.

He plucked a ten-dollar bill from his wallet and jammed it roughly into the skinny little man's breast pocket, then took Vince's arm in a hard grip and steered him toward the car.

"Now earn your dough," he said, slamming Vince into the front seat.

Vince sat hunched, hugging his arms across his chest, doing his best to raise a sneer.

"Cops!" he said. "Cops!"

"Shut up. Show me how to get there."

VINCE directed him with jerky lifts of his pointed chin. The Wakeman Street turnoff was south of the railroad tracks.

It was a street lined with mean houses, some of them gray and paintless, licked dry by countless seasons of sun, rain, heat and cold. The yellow house was conspicuous because it had been painted within the past ten years. Beside it was a wide macadam driveway that led to a barnlike structure behind.

Vince pointed to the driveway. "That's it, cop."

Sweeny turned into the driveway. The windows of the garage had been painted over, but the paint had chipped here and there and he could see specks of yellow light shining through. He got out of the car, dragging Vince after him.

"Where's the door?"

"Now wait a minute, pal. I took you this far. . . ."

"The door!" Sweeny shoved him ahead.

The door was unlocked. Vince darted to one side. "This is as far as I go, cop," he whispered.

Sweeny opened the door cautiously. He was just about two steps inside when he felt something jammed into the small of his back, and Vince said sharply, "Keep walking, cop. This time it's that door over there."

Sweeny opened the second door, and Vince called triumphantly, "Here he is, Berger—Officer Sweeny the sucker!" He giggled.

Sweeny turned cold. Berger was sitting on the edge of the scarred flattopped desk, negligently swinging one leg. Squat, pale-eyed, dressed in expensive tweeds, he was holding a gun. But it was not Berger who drew Sweeny's attention. It was little Mick Evans. The Mick sat tied in a chair about six feet to Berger's right.

The minute Sweeny walked in, Mick cried desperately, "He doesn't know a thing about it, Berger. I'm telling you. He doesn't know a damn thing."

Berger said coldly, "I don't care what he knows. He's the patsy. You spread the word?" he asked Vince.

"Up and down, boss, up and down," said Vince gleefully. "There ain't a guy in the city that don't know Sweeny's out looking for Mick Evans. I even tipped off a couple of precinct dicks. They all know he's out to smear the Mick, so it won't be a surprise to nobody."

"Leave him alone, Berger!" Mick pleaded. "I swear he doesn't know a thing. . . ."

Berger gave him an icy glance. "I hate nosy cops," he said. "You found out too much about me, Evans, and this is the kiss-off. Only I'm not going to be the one who does it. It's going to be your friend here. They're going to find you with your neck broken tomorrow morning, and they're going to find your friend here with three slugs in him—from your gun. There won't be any doubt in anybody's mind that Sweeny came at you, and you shot him in self-defense, but a big guy like that, even with three slugs in him, he was still able to break your neck. If you hadn't been so damn nosy about my business . . . give it to the big jerk, Vince. From the front!"

Grinning, Vince stepped around in front of Sweeny—then shrieked as Sweeny's huge hands leaped up and caught his arms. Sweeny's fingers closed around those stringy muscles like the bite of a vise. The gun dropped from Vince's paralyzed hand as he screamed again. The pain was beyond his feeble endurance. Berger swore and jumped back from the desk, darting to the side to get in a shot. Sweeny roared, lifting the squirming Vince clear of the floor, and hurled him straight at Berger like a basketball. Berger crouched and fired a split second before Vince crashed into him. Vince's scream was cut sharply as the heavy slug tore through his throat.

Sweeny took a long step and, bending, swung his heavy fist at the side of Berger's exposed jaw. It felt as if it were hitting a sack of coffee beans, and he knew he had smashed the bone. Berger rolled limply and flattened on his face. Sweeny scooped up both guns, then stood looking at them

with a kind of bewilderment. There was no longer any opposition. Vince was dead, and Berger was stone cold.

Mick Evans said with a kind of lilting Irish politeness, "If it's not too much bother, Mr. Sweeny dear, would you mind unbinding me from these bonds?"

"Oh sure, Mick, sure. You're not sore at me, Mick?"

"I never was sore at you, you muscle-bound clown. I was sore at meself for getting soused the night you clouted me. I had it coming. But Sweeny," he breathed, looking down at the unconscious Berger, "we got him. We got him for the big one—murder! He'll fry now."

Sweeny pulled his hand down his sweating face. His mind was chaos. Things had moved too fast and too deviously for him tonight.

"Sure, Mick, sure," he mumbled. "But what I don't get is why he sucked me in on this. Why'd he do that?"

Mick took a gentle breath and smiled sweetly. "It's like this, Mr. Sweeny dear. I found out too much, it seems, about that gentleman on the floor, Berger by name, but he didn't want to knock me off himself, so he set you up as the patsy. He had Vince spread the word from ginmill to ginmill that you were out after me tonight. Tomorrow when they found me with a broken neck and you with three slugs in you, everybody would have gone around shakin' his head and sayin' what a shame a bright boy like me had to pick a murderin' dumb-ox like you for a partner, and didn't we look nice in the casket and all. . . ."

"Yeah, yeah, I got all that, Mick, but still, I don't—"

"Never mind for now. Let's get this monkey booked, then you and me, we'll go to a nice ginmill and I'll draw you a blueprint and let you buy me a drink."

"Make it a cafeteria," said Sweeny unhappily. "I never want to see another ginmill as long as I live, even if I live that long!"





# FINGER

The killer walked into the Police Station and tore up all the Wanted posters with his picture on it, while the cops smiled and nodded. . . .

**Y**OU'LL never run across a stranger story of amateur detecting and a murderer's dramatic reformation than one that reached its climax in the little out-of-the-way town of Minot, North Dakota, a quarter of a century ago.

It was precisely because of the isolated quality of that rugged northwestern town that Earl J. Clark had hied himself to it. He had killed a man, a seaman named Cicero de Silva, in a fight over a disreputable woman in Los Angeles who had been supporting Clark. Clark had been convicted and sentenced to death but had broken out of jail. Footloose and fancy free, he decided that of all the places in the United States this region in North Dakota seemed to offer the best possibility of losing his past.

It seemed to have been an extremely wise choice. If any one ever got himself off on the right foot in a town, it was this well-built, rather handsome man. Toiling skillfully and industriously as a painter and paper hanger, it wasn't too long before he was made head of a new \$25,000 firm specializing in that work. It wasn't only that Jack Miller—that's what he called himself now—had won the confidence of the town as an honest and enterprising

business man, but he also was looked up to as a civic leader and his opinions were sought in the political and religious matters of the town.

So confident did the reborn Jack Miller become that he opened his new concern opposite the police station in Minot. Not only that, but one day he walked into his station, exchanged greetings with the officers, whom he knew personally, and then said he'd heard that there was a picture of an escaped murderer who looked like him and he was curious to have a look at it. A few minutes later the police had pulled the Earl J. Clark picture out of their files and business-leader Miller was saying, "You know, by gosh, there is some kind of resemblance, at that." There was a lot of kidding back and forth and Mr. Miller left, grinning.

When Mr. Miller went to Stanley, N. D., to see about the job of painting the jail there, he got ahold of the picture of Earl J. Clark that they had in their files and tore it up. "Looks too much like me," he smiled. Everybody laughed. It was a good joke.

Something else took place in Mr. Miller's life about this time. He met a young girl from one of the town's most highly regarded families. They fell in love and were

# FROM THE PAST!

By DAVE SANDS

married. It seemed perfectly natural when Helen presented her groom with a Bible for his wedding present.

There is no reason to doubt but that Mr. Miller and his bride would have lived happily ever afterwards, turning into the pillars of the community, if a very young man named William Nimmins hadn't protruded himself into the picture. Who was William Nimmins? Well, a nobody really, or almost a nobody. He was taking a course in detective work through the mail and was always going around "sleuthing." He was the butt of many jokes around Minot.

Besides faithfully perusing all the lessons in detecting that the postman delivered, young Nimmins also made a habit of studying all the rogues' gallery pictures at the Minot police station. One day he told the police there: "You know, I've given a lot of thought to the matter, taking into consideration facial contours and all that, and I've come to the conclusion that this Earl J. Clark, the escaped murderer, and the Jack Miller of this town are one and the same."

Everybody laughed. "We've known of the resemblance," they told him. "But there's nothing to it."

"Have you fingerprinted him?" young Nimmins persisted. "That's always the surest way to determine identity, you know."

There were some more grins but the police had to acknowledge that they hadn't actually taken Mr. Miller's fingerprints. The amateur mailbox sleuth kept after the police department, stating that in his opin-

ion it wasn't being as zealous as it should by neglecting this angle. Finally, to humor the correspondence shamus and get him out of their hair, the police decided to go ahead and fingerprint civic leader Miller. It was rather embarrassing, but solicitously and apologetically, explaining it was a matter of routine, they asked Mr. Miller if he'd mind coming over to be fingerprinted.

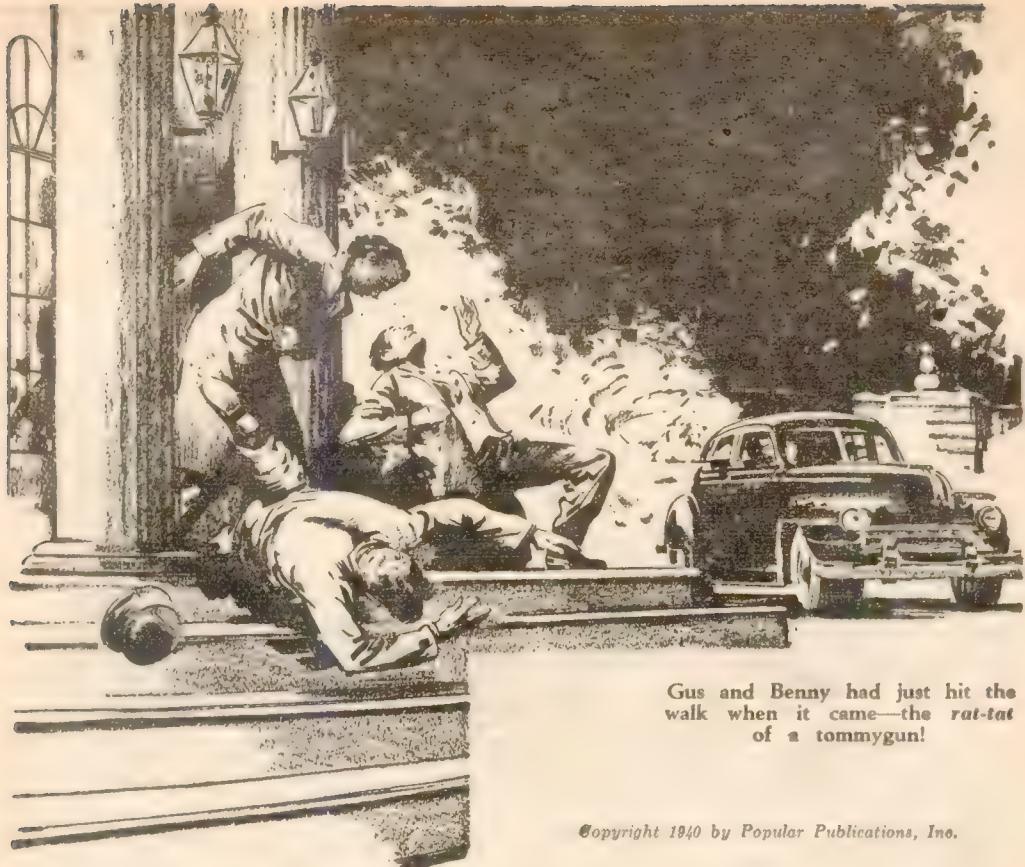
If there was any doubt at all about Mr. Miller, it vanished when the business leader promptly and good-naturedly showed up at headquarters as requested. The fingerprinting was done in an atmosphere of pleasant, friendly bantering.

It was, therefore, a considerable shock to the Minot police department when it was informed several days later by Los Angeles that Minot's paragon of civic virtues, Jack Miller, was none other than murderer Earl J. Clark. But perhaps the strangest part of the whole story is that when the police went over to arrest Jack Miller—there he was.

Knowing why his fingerprints had been taken, he nevertheless had made no attempt to escape. It was as if he'd hoped against hope that since he'd changed so completely, somehow his fingerprints couldn't be the same either.

But fingerprints are cold-bloodedly scientific, not sentimental, and, with the assistance of a determined correspondence-school amateur detective, they took the murderer away from a stunned populace that had given him the cloak of respectability, and sent his body plunging through the trapdoor of the gallows.





Gus and Benny had just hit the walk when it came—the rat-tat of a tommygun!

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# DEATH-DANCE FOR A DEBUTANTE

WHEN Italian dames are good-looking, they're really good-looking. This one was gorgeous! She was small and sultry with a full, damp, red-lacquered mouth and a skin so white and transparent you could watch the blue veins beneath it beat an emotional tattoo. Her thick, black, curly hair had a blue

sheen like mist, but it was her eyes that made her excitingly beautiful. They weren't big, liquid brown eyes like you'd expect. They were narrow and slanting eyes and so intensely black you couldn't see the pupil. They gave her a half-caste look, like a Malay girl in a Broadway show; you kept wanting to tell her to go home and

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By TIAH DEVITT

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The Grigorios were as murderous a clan as you'd find in the underworld, but somebody was methodically wiping them out . . . Until only Tony, the little sister, was left: The prettiest and sweetest of the Grigorios —and by far the deadliest!



get her sarong. She'd do all right in a sarong.

smothered as Ben jumped on his back like into the strong north light and I could see she was worried.

"Pat," she said in that soft, husky voice of hers, "you must help me find Joey!"

She leaned toward me, all soft and helpless and sweet, and if I hadn't known her so well, I would have been touched. But I do know her, have known her since she was a kid. And I thought if Joey was missing she probably bumped him off herself.

This little bundle of beauty was Tony Grigorio and she came from the town where the big gangsters grow. Yeah, little sister to the big, bad Grigorio boys: Gus the brains, Benny the killer, and Beppo the confidence man.

Tony started like any other slum urchin. Cute and light-fingered, she learned fast. What she couldn't beg she swiped. A talent, the latter, which she never outgrew. I had a little experience with her myself one night. We were in a taxi, and I thought I was making a little time but when we got to her apartment she hopped out through the door before I could even say good night. I stood there feeling wronged and hurt. Not until I started to look at my watch did I know how wronged I'd been. I jumped through that door and yelled into the house phone.

"Hey, you light-fingered dip, what about my watch and wallet!"

"Pat," she said, "I was only trying to teach you a lesson. When you want to take something that doesn't belong to you, you have to be more subtle."

She sent back the wallet—empty, and a pawn ticket for the watch.

THE Grigorio boys were slow muscling in on the numbers racket, and then it was only a front. You pay for your protection, Gus figured, and you're okay with the cops. When Beppo got rubbed out

robbing a warehouse, it was a little embarrassing. But Gus convinced the D. A. that Beppo, a respectable numbers racketeer, was shot while passing by.

Gus was the brains, the head of the gang and the family. It was Gus who decided that Antonia, the little sister, ought to be a lady. They hauled her in out of the alley, scrubbed her and got her a tutor. When she'd grasped the rudiments of civilized deportment, they packed her off to Italy to school. With her natural genius for picking up what didn't belong to her, she took on culture in a big way. Her French was as good as Benny's gun work, and her manner, smoother than Beppo's. She took music and the old masters like Gus took suckers at the races.

It was Gus himself who told me about Tony's debut. He even asked me to the party. I was on the force then, a first grade detective. I knew plenty about Gus and Grigories, plenty, but reform was here and Gus was all set up with a string of legal nightspots.

Any cop who spent his time trying to hang old scores on the Grigorio boys was asking for trouble. Their protection came from way up the line, and I mean from the top.

"Tony," Gus said. "She is a great lady now, Pat, so polished, so charming—ah, she will break your heart, and I will break your neck if you hang around. We want her to marry a gentleman."

"Thanks," I said, "she's got a rare background. Some people would call it raw."

"I've furnished a whole house for her," Gus said, "an estate in the country—all with antiques, museum pieces, Pat."

I didn't believe it, I hadn't heard of any museum being robbed lately.

"Okay," I said, "I'll come to the party."

"White tie," Gus said. Can you imagine the nerve of that gorilla?

"White tie," I said, to a guy who should have worn a hemp tie long ago.

It was some party. It'll be a long time

before the old burg sees another like it. All the missing ice stolen in the last decade was there in brand new platinum settings. Nothing less than a mink or a Russian sable could even get through the door. The walls were hung with silver brocade and covered with fresh cut orchids; the two biggest name bands in the country played until morning. The champagne flowed like Tennyson's brook, and the food—well, had I known, I would have brought along a hamper. There was a blue neon sign of gardenias and smilax, just under the ceiling, and it read:

#### WELCOME HOME, ANTONIA

And beneath the sign, she stood, an enchantingly lovely child, in a simple foaming white dress, holding an old-fashioned bouquet of roses. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe there was anything that sweet and lovely in the world. She made even the hardest boiled politicians feel their hands were dirty.

Don't misunderstand—this wasn't any brawl. Just the Grigorio boys, those eminent citizens, each so distinguished in his own line, presenting society to their little sister.

**A**BOUT dawn the crowd started thinning out. I kind of hung around. I heard Gus telling the guests good night, saw him signal to the "boys." Gus never moved without a bodyguard; he still felt it wasn't healthy. The boys formed a flying wedge, Gus in the middle, big Benny right beside him. Tony a few paces back. And then Gus whirled around and caught my eye.

"Take Mr. Kelly's arm, Tony," he said, smiling, "and wait in the foyer with him until our car is clear."

Antonia slipped a very small hand through my arm.

"My brothers," she said, with her funny little accent (she hadn't spoken English in years), "my brothers fear I will catch cold."

"Yeah," I said, and watched the boys swing out the door in quick formation. Gus and Benny had just hit the walk when it came; *rat-tat—ratatat*—the *rat-tat* of a tommygun! The glass doors splattered like water from a sprinkler. I threw the kid flat on the carpet and spreadeagled myself over her.

*"Rat-a-tat—rat-a-tat—"*

And then the scream of a high-powered car racing away. I jumped up and charged through the blasted doors to the curb, the car was vanishing around the corner, only the red tail light blinking evilly. I scrambled to the nearest call box, and gave the alarm, then I came back, and pushed through the morbid, gaping crowd.

There was Tony in her white tulle dress, on her knees, between the riddled bodies of her slaughtered brothers. With a bit of lace handkerchief she was trying to stop the spurting blood.

"Giuseppi! Benito!" she crooned. "It is I, Antonia. Speak! Speak!"

I caught her by the waist and lifted her to her feet. She held the red wet ball of her handkerchief tight in her hand. Her face was blank. I picked her up, the crowd gave way and I carried her back into the club where the blue neon sign blazed:

#### WELCOME HOME, ANTONIA

I grabbed some ice out of a water pitcher and rubbed her face and neck.

"Listen," I said, "It's war. They've been at war all their lives, and tonight they lost. Think of it like that."

"At war with whom?" she said.

"Other gangs—" I said.

"No," she said, "The gang wars are all over. Giuseppi said so. He is legal, now—no, this is not a gang war."

"If you'd lived in this town as long as I have, you'd know a gang war when you saw it," I said. I tried to sound convincing. I wanted to convince myself. The Grigorio boys had plenty of enemies. I knew that.

But I knew as well as I knew my name, that this tonight was no gang killing! The old mobs were broken and dissolved, any punk knew that. The Grigorio boys and four of their pals were mowed down, slaughtered in the approved gorilla fashion, but not by a rival mob! I wanted to know who the hoods in that car were—but more than that I wanted to know who paid them!

THE chief and two inspectors and the D. A. all arrived on the scene. Questions, notes, photogs, ambulances.

"Well," the D. A. said, "another gang killing. Hope this won't mean an epidemic." He was a smug little guy, the typical reform candidate, waltzing and drinking tea with better government, making deals with syndicated crime.

"You're wrong," I said, "this was cold-blooded murder."

Beppo's widow, a dizzy ex-chorine was hovering over Tony. Tony just sat very white and still. The horror of it hadn't really hit her, then. She was still trying to figure out the answer.

I saw Max Northrup, Gus's mouthpiece go over and start talking to her. Then he bundled both girls into a police car and they drove off.

The next day I read the papers and I thought Tony's angle had been peculiarly played down. That kind of massacre is a front-page story, but add a beautiful girl, eye-witness to the slaughter of her brothers, and the tabloid editors should have gone mad. They didn't. There wasn't a picture of Tony anywhere. There was only one line referring to her: ". . . following a party in honor of their sister, recently returned from abroad" I couldn't get it.

The more I thought about it the fishier it seemed. I started asking questions. I didn't get anywhere. Nobody seemed to know anything about Tony Grigorio. I tried to contact Bubbles, Beppo's widow. Her telephone had been disconnected; the janitor of the apartment house where she

lived knew nothing about her. None of her old cronies had seen her. The dumb blonde had vanished. And she didn't show up at the funeral; neither did Tony. Funny, huh?

I tried to tell myself I was crazy. That the girls were merely ducking a lot of publicity—which wasn't like Bubbles—or maybe they were scared and hiding out. Still they could have had a police escort at the funeral.

Something was screwy.

Then one day I was walking down the street and somebody tugged my arm. A funny little guy. He looked worried and scared.

"You're Kelly, ain't you—you was to the party for Tony?"

"So what?" I said.

"Well, can't you do something for her? They've got her locked up."

"Who's got her locked up?" I said.

"The cops, mister; the D. A."

"What!" I shouted. "Why? What's she done? Where is she?"

"In the booby hatch," he said, "and mister, she ain't no crazier than you are! They think she knows something, and they ain't taking any chances on letting her talk. They can't do that," he said. "You got to do something."

"Come in here," I said. "Have a beer and talk fast. Who are you, where did you get this dope—why'd you come to me?"

He said his name was Joe Bostelli, he was a sort of valet and general handyman to Gus Grigorio. Gus had taken a suite for Tony at a big downtown hotel. She hadn't been back to the suite since the killing. The hotel wouldn't talk. Somebody came and got her things, and that was that. I told Joe to keep in touch with me and started checking up in earnest. It wasn't long before I was standing across the carpet from the D. A. himself, and the more he talked, the madder I got.

"Now Kelly," he said, "I didn't know you were interested in the child or we would have consulted you. You must realize

this was a horrible shock to her. She's having the best of care."

"She doesn't need that kind of care," I said.

"The psychiatrists who examined her, and her guardian, disagree," he said.

"Guardian?" I said.

"Naturally," he said, "she's under age, she has no relatives, no fit relatives, to take care of her. Judge Drew appointed a guardian. Judge Drew himself went thoroughly into the case before he sanctioned her commitment to the sanitarium. He was convinced, Kelly, that her mind has been temporarily unbalanced by her harrowing experience."

"And where is this sanitarium?" I said.

The D. A. shook his head. "That I can't tell you," he said. "It is my duty, Kelly, to protect her from the vengeance that overtook her brothers."

"Maybe," I said, "but I'll tell you right now, that kid isn't crazy!"

That night I tramped the streets, I couldn't sleep, and the next day I went to see Judge Drew. I just sent in my card and wrote on the back, "Friend of Antonia Grigorio."

A fine looking man, six feet, broad-shouldered, iron gray hair, heavy dark brows above clear, intelligent eyes, a straight nose and an iron chin.

"I'm glad you've come, Kelly," he said, "I've turned this town upside down looking for some reputable person who was interested in that child."

We had a long talk, he showed me the reports on Tony Grigorio the doctors had sent them. I left. I felt with Drew looking after her she'd be okay. He'd done more for kids in trouble than any other man on the bench. He was courageous and fair and straight as a die. I'd never heard a breath against him, though he could crack down plenty when he wanted to.

After that I forgot about Tony Grigorio. I had a run-in with the chief, left the force, and hung out my own shingle.

It was a blistering hot summer day when a little guy walked into the office. At first, I didn't quite place him, then I remembered, Joey, Joey Bostelli.

"Tony," he said to me, "she's in business now." He grinned. "A nice travel bureau. Maybe some time you drop in and say hello."

"Sure," I said, "what's the name of the travel bureau?"

"The Arrow Travel Service," he said, sweetly.

I nearly fainted. I'd heard plenty about the Arrow Travel Service!

"We're on our way, right now," I said, and grabbed my hat.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Hunt for a Body

THE Arrow Travel Service had a beautiful front, modern furniture, pretty colored maps—*Come to Cannes*. Two nice old ladies were in a huddle with a wavy-haired young man—everything was too lovely and aboveboard.

Joey took me back to the office. He rapped twice, and then opened the door.

She was sitting at a modern desk upholstered in white leather, tilted back in her chair, a cigarette hanging from her lower lip. I stood in the doorway like a big lug and stared at her. Stared at a beautiful, frozen mask of a face, a diabolical caricature of the lovely child she had been. It hit me with such impact that my knees went weak: She had been absolutely sane! They shut her up with those mad women, locked her in hell—and she was sane!

"Well, flatfoot," she said, "what can I do for you?"

I was glad she said it in that sarcastic way. It was pleasanter to face the woman she was than to remember the child she had been. I shut the door and ambled over to the desk. I gave her back the same twisted smile she gave me.

"I've just robbed a bank," I said, "I've got a lot of hot bonds. I'd like to go some place quiet and take a long rest, under a different system of government."

"You might like our Alaskan tour," she said, looking me right in the eyes, "lovely boat trip, we could land you just this side of the American line."

"Yeah, I knew you could fix it," I said and eased into a chair. I sat looking at her, it was uncanny, she'd played that scene just as Gus would play it.

"But you can't prove it, copper," she said.

"I'm not a cop," I said. "I'm a private investigator. Maybe I can send you some customers. Old globe trotters looking for the quaint spots where extradition isn't easy."

"Sure," she said, "our terms are cash, in advance, and I mean plenty of cash."

"You better take it easy," I said. "I'm hearing plenty about the Arrow Service every day. You don't want Uncle Sam taking an uncle-like interest in the business."

"He can't touch me. I'm not afraid of Uncle Sam."

Nor anybody else, I thought. And why would she be? She had Gus's brain and Beppo's smoothness. She had something else—too. It didn't make me easy. But I could see it, and I could feel it. Lurking back of those slant eyes of hers was something of Benny, the killer.

I saw quite a lot of her. I went around every time I needed a physical and mental chill. She was the smoothest crook I ever met. Then, finally, she appeared at my office. (That's where you came in. . . .)

**S**O WHEN she sat in my office so sweet and helpless and said, "Pat, you've got to help me find Joey Bostelli! You've got to!" I wondered what the gag was.

"You've built up a ducky little organization," I said, "If you really wanted to find Joey, you could."

"I'm through with the organization," she said. "I'm leaving the travel agency.

I'm going straight—I was a lady once, remember?" Her smile was wistful.

"What are you selling me?" I said.

"Just this," she said. "I'm in love—I'm going to be married. I'm going to forget everything except my life in Italy. Pat, I've been wrong. I thought when I got out of that place that I'd make the world pay for every hour of hell I'd gone through. I planned it all out; I'd help thieves stay free to rob and steal, I'd help killers go on killing. But I don't feel like that any more."

"Peace," I said, "is wonderful! And who, Tony, is this great white light?"

"Ronald Drew," she said.

"What!" I yelled. "Tony, not Judge Drew's son? Why, my lord, he's engaged to Pamela Van Brough. It's the marriage of the year."

"No," she said, "he's breaking the engagement. I'm sorry about that, Pat, sorry for her—but after all, it was just one of those things. And we really love each other."

"But the judge," I said. "Tony, do you think he's going to let his son jilt the daughter of one of the oldest and best families and marry—"

"A Grigorio?" she said. "No. He's furious. He's threatened Ronald with all the weapons of an irate father, but it won't do him any good."

Her chin set.

"You're pretty sure of Ronald," I said.

"He loves me," she said, "and he wants to get away. Do you think he's been happy?" she flared suddenly. "Do you think it's any fun being the kowtowing son of a successful and prominent father? Every step in Ronald's life has been dictated by the judge. When papa says jump, Ronnie jumps. And Ronald doesn't love his father—he—hates him."

"Look," I said, "I don't want to blight love's dream, but if you give up the travel agency and papa kicks Ronald out on his ear, just what are you going to live on? Ronald Drew never made a dime."

"Now, we're getting somewhere," she said. She leaned forward. "Pat, do you think as shrewd an operator as Gus Grigorio died broke?"

"Hell, no!" I said.

"He left everything to me," Tony said, "he even made a will. But I've never seen one dime of the money. I haven't had even the change he had in his pocket the night he was shot."

I was astonished. "Say," I said, "you've got to have a talk with Northup. He was the mouthpiece. He must know where the money is."

"Joey went to have a little talk with Northup," Tony said. "Joey was with Gus when Gus handed over two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in bearer bonds to Northup for safekeeping. Joey went to talk to Northup and Joey hasn't come back."

For a minute we sat and stared at each other.

"And you think—" I said.

"I don't think, I know!" she said. "Max Northup had the Grigorio boys rubbed out the night of my homecoming party. Then he gets himself appointed my guardian, and then has me declared insane. That leaves him in complete control of all the Grigorio property. It was a lovely little scheme!"

At first I couldn't believe it—and then all the screwy circumstances flashed through my mind. Bearer bonds—two hundred and fifty grand. If Tony was dead and Gus left no will, they'd go to the state. But if Tony were alive and incompetent—they'd go to Northup. Northup, her guardian, acting in her interest!

I lay back in my chair. Northup, the shady, shrewd rat, was capable of that play. Capable of rubbing out the Grigorio's, but could any man lock a lovely child in an insane asylum and keep her there—plan to keep her there all her life? It made my nerve cells crawl.

"Tony," I said, "how did you get out of that place?"

She smiled. "There was a young doctor," she said. "That's one thing, Pat, men like Northup never count on. Human decency. The doctor interested some of the greatest psychiatrists in the country in my case. They went to Judge Drew and Drew had me released. He had to."

"Tony," I said, "Drew wouldn't have had you in there five minutes if he'd known the truth. The doctors who worked for Northup lied to him. Drew's okay."

"Yeah?" Tony said.

"Yeah," I said. "Now beat it; I'm looking for Joey, fast."

"Thanks," she said. She hesitated. "Pat," she said softly, "If it weren't for Ronnie, I wouldn't need you. I'm the last Grigorio and I've got business to finish with Max Northup. I've been thinking about him for a long time."

"Forget it," I said. "Do you want a prison rap or would you rather have your dough?"

"They'd never pin it on me," she said. "I could get away with murder."

On that she left.

AS SOON as she was gone I got busy. The first place I inquired for Joey was at the morgue. I had a feeling Joey's interview with Northup was going to be plenty final for Joey.

"Nope, he ain't come in yet," Charlie said. "You might find him at the bottom of the lake wrapped in a cake of cement. We've missed a lot of customers that way."

I made a routine check of the hospitals and then called Northup's office. I wanted to talk to that guy.

"Mr. Northup has been out of town since Wednesday," the girl said; it was Friday. "We don't expect him till the first of the week."

She wouldn't give me a forwarding address.

I had some dinner and did some thinking. Northup kept a suite of rooms at a Lake Shore hotel; he also kept a penthouse

on top of a business building down near the Loop. I took a gat in case Mr. Northup was at home and nasty, and a bunch of efficient keys in case he was out. It wouldn't do any harm to take a look around.

It was nearly eleven when I ambled up to the building. I had to ring for the night porter, which was bad. He let me in and he didn't seem surprised when I asked for Northup. He led me to a small self-service elevator and said:

"Top floor. Don't reckon he's there."

I pushed the top button and went up. When we stopped I started to pull the door open, but it didn't budge. Then I noticed the door on the other side of the elevator grille was made of steel and had a peep hole like an old-fashioned speakeasy. Just below that was a bell. I put my paw through the open grille work and rang. Nothing happened. I tried again to force the elevator door—still no go. I rang again.

This time I heard somebody shuffle up to the steel door. The guard was lifted and a blowsy female with frizzled hair and dopey eyes peered at me.

"What do you want?" she said.

"I've got to see Max Northup."

"He ain't here."

"I'll come in and wait," I said.

"He won't be here tonight," she said.  
"You want to wait, you wait where you are. I can't let nobody in."

With that the guard slid over the hole and I heard her shuffle off.

"You wouldn't know where I could find Northup tonight? He's going to raise hell if I don't reach him quick."

"No," the porter said wistfully, watching me fold and crease the five. "Mike drove him out to the lodge last Wednesday, I ain't seen him since."

Then we got down to business.

Northup's lodge was about seventy miles out. Maybe it was a wild goose chase. But if Northup was at the lodge, it was an ideal place for a private chat.

It was an eerie drive. I had to leave the

pavement and go down a sandy road with dark trees crowding in on me. The headlights splashed the thick undergrowth, back in the woods an owl hooted. It was the loneliest road I ever traveled, not a house nor a gas station, not another car. The summer people had long since gone and although there was no snow, it was bitter cold.

I found the twisted tree at the fork, and turned north. I was running toward the lake now, my eyes peeled for the lodge. The porter had made a number of trips out with Northup's chauffeur. He told me there was a stone gate on the right a few miles on from the twisted tree. Beyond the gate lay Northup's property. I was beginning to think I'd missed it, when the headlights picked out the gray stones. I parked the car, and got out.

I went down the long drive as quietly as I could. I hadn't expected the lodge to be so far from the gate. The drive turned abruptly and then I saw the house, a squat bulk beneath the towering trees. The house was dark, not a light showed. I felt my way nearer. A dry twig broke under me like a firecracker. I slid along the log walls toward the front verandah. There I stopped and listened. Nothing but the lake breaking against the shore. Cautiously, I went up the steps. On either side of the French door the windows gaped emptily. The front door, heavy, iron-banded, was closed. I found the knob. To my surprise, it turned easily and I pushed the door open.

I stepped into the long living-room. Carefully, I flashed my torch. In the fireplace lay the blackened logs and dead ashes of a once roaring fire. Before the fireplace was a big couch and a long table. On the table were glasses, empty, a decanter, not empty, a tin of cigarettes.

I slid over and poured myself a drink, a big one. I nibbled at a hunk of cheese; the cheese was stale. Still I didn't hear a sound.

"Hello!" I called, "Hello—Northup—anybody home?"

Out in the yard an owl hooted, a mouse scurried across the rafters, that was all. Not a human soul around.

I struck a match and lit a big oil lamp. The soft light sprayed out over the room. Wednesday's newspapers lay on the floor by an easy chair, a half-smoked cigar sat in an ash tray.

Funny, I thought, to go off and leave the place like this. Why wouldn't Northup have somebody in to clean it up? I picked up the newspaper and there on the Navajo rug lay a round glittering object. A woman's vanity case.

So, Northup, it seemed, had been entertaining a lady!

I walked around the far end of the couch and stopped, staring at the floor. Just beyond my toes lay a human hand! The hand was attached to an arm protruding from under the couch. The hair at the back of my neck started to prickle. I knelt down and reached under the couch—took a firm hold on the arm and pulled the body forward. It lay face down and there was a hole through the back of the head, ringed with dried blood.

I turned the face sideways and stared into the dead, cold eyes of the eminent Mr. Max Northup! There was no mistaking that weasel face.

I got another drink. As I poured it I noticed a napkin on the table with a red smear! Blood? No—lipstick! A violent lacquer red, the kind show girls wear, and—I nearly dropped my glass!

"Tony! Tony Grigorio," I said, and grabbed the vanity case. Sure enough, engraved inside the lid were the simple words: *Tony, from Ronnie.*

So little Tony bumped off Northup! But why come to me with a song and dance about Joey? I didn't get it.

"I ought to let her hang," I said. But I dropped the vanity case in my pocket and kept my gloves on, and now I got out my handkerchief and polished the glasses and the decanter and the table top. I whipped

off my muffler and mopped up every finger-print in that room. Then I blew out the lamp and bolted back to the car.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Witness

THE car was headed toward the lake. I was in a hurry, but not in too big a hurry to risk getting bogged in the sand. I eased into the drive, and turned slowly. As the headlights spilled over to the right, I caught one glimpse of a man's white face.

"Hey!" I shouted, and swung out onto the runningboard. I heard someone crashing through the dry woods.

Maybe I should have given chase but it was three o'clock in the morning, I was frozen nearly stiff, hungry and mad. I had no inclination to plunge into a black wilderness after a disembodied face. I drove back to my hotel and fell into bed.

I hadn't slept more than three hours when the phone rang, a wild jangle, hauling me up from peaceful oblivion.

"Hello," I meant to snarl, but I was too sleepy.

"Kelly? This is Joey Bostelli."

"Who?" I shouted. "Where in hell are you?"

"Listen," he said. "Come at once. I can tell you everything. I was there Wednesday night. I saw everything. . . . Hurry!" He gave me an address on the South Side and rang off.

I jumped out of bed and into a shower. The cold water brought me to. I even tried a noble baritone selection, shaved, and stepped forth to hear a voice from my bedroom:

"Ain't he beautiful, Mr. Poletag? Once he was the pride of the force. See them biceps and them red curls? It's a sight you're seeing, my friend Silas, a real sight! Let me introduce you proper: Mr. Silas Poletag, meet Mr. Patrick Kelly."

I stood gazing out the bathroom door,

at my unexpected guests. Detective John Mahoney and a lanky, fish-mouthed, straw-haired individual with ears too big and pants too short, who was sitting on my bed.

Johnny was helping himself to a shot of my liquor.

"We didn't bother to rap, Pat," he said. "It's an official call."

"It's him all right!" Fishmouth said.

"What is this, Johnny?" I said. "And where did you get that?" I pointed at Silas.

"Found him at the bottom of a missionary barrel," Johnny said. "But he's got news for you, Pat. They want you back in Oakmulgee County—on a little charge of murder."

"Murder!" I said.

"That's all," Johnny said. "Guess you didn't have time to do anything else. The chief says—" he paused—"we will cooperate with the Oakmulgee authorities in every way!"

"He would," I said. And I remembered just how happy the chief would be to pin anything on me. A murder rap would suit him fine.

"What murder?" I said. "Where is Oakmulgee County? Never heard of it."

"It surrounds Mr. Max Northup's summer lodge," Johnny said. "Your car was parked outside the gate between two and three o'clock this morning—we have the license number—and your driving license all nicely checked. Mr. Silas Poletag is here to identify you. He's an amateur detective. He investigated after your hasty departure and found Max Northup dead. It doesn't look pretty, Pat."

I swabbed a few times with a towel.

"Don't be that way, Johnny," I said. "The guy had been dead two days when I found him. They haven't any case against me." But my tonsils felt too big for my throat.

"It's too bad," Johnny said, "the best lawyer you could hire is dead." His banter died. "Take my advice, Pat, and beat it up

there and try to clear yourself—it looks tough for you."

THERE didn't seem to be any choice on my part as to whether I'd go or not. A deputy was waiting in the lobby, and Johnny had been assigned to see that I made the trip without stopovers.

I wasn't feeling happy. I knew too much about county medical examiners. I'd been seen leaving the scene of the crime; I hadn't reported the body. No, it wasn't pretty. Damn Tony!

On the drive I sat between Johnny and Silas. Johnny and I had been pals. I knew the chief sent him along from malicious spite.

"How come you were up so late last night?" I said to Silas. There was no point in my denying I'd been at the lodge.

"Well," he grinned in his peculiarly annoying way. "See, I'm working with the Federal men, now. We've had smugglers landing on the lake, and I'm deputized to hunt 'em. Why, one of their biggest operators got me on the job."

I looked at Johnny. He looked at me. "What in hell were you doing up there, Pat?" he said.

"Never mind now," I said. "I'll tell the sheriff the truth. With a man like Silas on the case, it'll work out in no time. He knew Northup had been dead for days—Washington was just keeping it quiet."

"Washington didn't know anything about it," Silas said, "until I phoned their operative at his private number. I seen another little guy I wasn't sure about. He wasn't at the lodge, he was kinda taking walks around. I seen him last Wednesday."

"Last Wednesday!" I said. "It probably was the killer! You'll look fine, Silas, when the medical examiner proves Northup was killed Wednesday and you didn't cop the little guy."

Silas' jaw dropped.

We drove up to the sheriff's office. The sheriff was a rangy, craggy-faced man with

keen eyes that didn't miss anything.

We didn't shake hands, but he offered me a chair. I sat down and told my story. I never told any story so well before or since.

"I'm a private detective," I said. "Most of my clients are nice people, the kind of nice people who are always afraid to go to the police. It's different with you here, Sheriff. The voters know you and trust you."

He uncrossed his interwound legs and offered me a cigar.

"Now, I had a client, working in the interest of a young girl, whose family he had known intimately. He told me Mr. Northup was holding up her inheritance. He was going to have it out with Max, but—he knew Northup's underworld connections and power, and, the little guy was afraid. He retained me to look for him, to make public his story, if he didn't come back! I waited—you can imagine how anxiously I waited. But my client never returned! I tried to reach Northup. The porter told me he had come to his lodge, in this glorious country, on Wednesday. So I came up last night. I found Northup dead. You and your Medical Examiner have already discovered that he had been dead some days!"

I only paused for breath. "What I want you to do, Sheriff, is to cooperate with me in finding my client. There is a link between my client's disappearance, Northup, and the murder. A sinister, uncanny link!"

I didn't look at Johnny Mahoney. I knew, as a pal, he'd try to keep his face straight.

The sheriff was swept off his pins. "Sure, I'll cooperate with you," he said. "But let me get this straight."

I straightened it out for him by talking faster and then firing questions.

"Have you found the lethal weapon?" Nope, they hadn't. But they were looking. "Fingerprints?"

"Nope, darn few. Mostly Northup's."

Had they checked tire tracks, tracks

made Wednesday night or early Thursday? Well, no, but they would.

Finally, I stood up and held out my hand. The sheriff took it. I urged him to keep in touch with me. Then Johnny and I went back to the car.

"You so-and-so," Johnny said: "That was raw!"

"Johnny," I said seriously, "I've never been in deeper trouble in my life. I didn't take that sheriff in for one minute. It's just that he doesn't have a case against me yet, and he knows it. But Johnny, I'm the only suspect he's got and it's damn near election!"

There are a lot of beautiful little girls in our town, but when we drove in, there was just one I wanted to see. I pushed the maid out of the way and strode right into the boudoir where, at one o'clock in the afternoon, she was having breakfast.

"Well," Tony said, "if it isn't the dawn patrol."

"The patrol will be here soon enough, sweetheart," I said, "and little Patrick isn't going to be the fall guy."

"What do you mean?" she said, and I saw that she realized I wasn't kidding.

"You killed Northup," I said, "but I'm not taking the rap."

"Northup?" she said. "My God, Pat, is he dead?"

"Is he dead?" I mimicked. "Why didn't you come clean with me, Tony? Now we are in a jam."

"But, Pat, I don't understand," she said. "I haven't seen Northup in months."

"You saw him last Wednesday night at his lodge and put a thirty-eight caliber bullet through the back of his head," I said. "And listen, smarty-pants, you did everything but leave an affidavit." I tossed the vanity case into her lap.

She picked it up, looked at it, looked at me.

"My compact," she said. "Where did you find it?"

"Innocence, I found it within two feet

of Northup's very dead and nasty body. Moreover that palpitation lip goo you use was smeared all over the napkin."

For a minute she stared at me, then down at the compact, and an incredible horror crept over her face. Without a word she pounced on the phone and dialed frantically. Her voice was so low I didn't catch just what she said, but when she turned back to me she looked like a disillusioned child.

"I left my bag in Ronnie's car Tuesday," she said. "Thursday he returned the bag, but the compact and lipstick were gone. I thought I might have left them in a dressing-room, somewhere. Pat, I didn't kill Northup. I haven't the faintest idea who killed him. But somebody did a beautiful job framing me!"

AND I looked into her funny slant eyes and knew she was telling the truth. But if Tony didn't kill Northup—who did? Joey? Hell no, Joey wouldn't frame Tony; he worshipped her. My brain started to race. Joey knew who did kill Northup—he was there! I grabbed my hat.

"Wait," Tony said, "someone is coming I want you to meet."

"Sorry," I said. "I've got a date with an oracle." But I didn't rush out. I wish to God I had, but just then the maid announced Ronnie Drew. He was a rather small, weak-chinned kid, with big, appealing eyes and glossy hair. He bowed to me from half across the room and didn't offer his hand. Maybe finding a strange red-headed guy with his girl makes a guy nervous. Anyhow, Ronnie Drew was plenty nervous. And Tony wasn't helpful.

"Ronnie," she said, "why did you take my compact out of my bag?"

"I didn't," he said. "Darling, if it's lost I'll get you another."

"Sure, he will," I cut in. I didn't want Tony to sing about Northup.

"You look jumpy," Tony said to him. "What's wrong?"

"Well, you were so—so intense over the phone, and just having got the news about Northup—"

"What about Northup?" Tony said.

"He's—he's dead," Ronnie said. I looked at the boy. His mouth kept twitching and twice I caught him wiping the palms of his hands on his pants.

"Everybody dies," Tony said, "and he was no particular pal of mine."

"Don't say that!" Drew said. "Tony, don't say anything against him—it might involve you. He was murdered."

Tony laughed, a nice upstage laugh.

"And how could his being murdered affect me?" she said evenly. "Do you think that someone is trying to frame me, Ronnie?"

"Why, wh—of course not!" Ronnie said, and he tried to grin. "What would make you think a thing like that? I only want you to be careful, because the police might think you had a—a grudge against Max. Because of that sanitarium business."

"You're sure that's the only reason the police would think of me?" Tony said, evenly.

He took a few steps nearer. "What's wrong, Tony?" he said huskily.

"Nothing," she said, "but I want you to find my compact and bring it to me tonight!"

I watched Ronnie. I saw the expression that raced across his face, a ghastly fear! He snuffed it out quickly. But Tony saw it, too.

"You're being childish," he said. "I have no idea where your compact is—"

"I think," Tony said, "you have a damned good idea where it is!"

"Now children," I said, "don't quarrel. The police probably have the compact."

"What do you mean?" Ronnie's voice shrilled through the sunlit room. "Why," I said soothingly, "any honest citizen finding lost property turns it into the nearest precinct station. What did you think I meant?"

RONNIE wiped his face with a slender, ineffectual white hand. I shot a quick look at Tony, and a chill went down my spine. Gus used to look like that when he sized up a guy as a traitor—a guy he'd always thought a friend.

Just then the house phone rang. Tony answered, looked surprised. "My sister-in-law!" she said. "Mrs. Bubbles Grigorio."

"Have her up," I whispered.

The missing blonde, grown slightly blonder and stouter, came through the door like the crescendo of Sousa's band. She didn't see Ronnie, and if she saw me, I didn't matter.

"Tony," she said, "you've got to tell me or I'll choke it out of you! Where is Joey Bostelli?"

Tony played it quiet. "Mr. Kelly is the detective I've engaged to look for Joey," she said. "Sit down, Bubbles, and relax."

"I won't," the blonde said, and beneath the mascara her usually vapid eyes were flashing. "I told Joey where Max was. I told him—and he—the rotten little louse, killed him—killed Max."

"And Max," Tony said, "killed Gus and Benny and sent me to the asylum."

That stopped the blonde. She looked at Tony, incredulously, and then she started to cry. "I don't believe it," she said, "Max was swell to me. After that awful night, he smuggled me away—he paid for everything. He—"

"Paid with body and soul," I said. Tony slapped my wrists.

"And then," the weeping woman continued, "Joey came to the apartment—he was just sort of lurking, when I came out to the car Wednesday night, but I saw him, and for old times' sake, we had a drink. He wanted to see Max; he said it was about Gus's will. I wasn't interested for myself," Bubbles had the grace to add, "just for you, Tony. I told Joey Max was at the lodge, and no one, no one else in the world knew he was there!"

"If you will excuse me," Ronnie said,

"I've got to get back to the office. I'll call you, Tony, and don't worry about the compact."

"I won't give it a thought," Tony said. And her tone hurt even a hard-boiled yegg like me.

I got out at Thirty-Fifth Street and walked. I had a feeling I was being followed. I grabbed another cab, drove back north, got out, went into a movie, out an exit, back to Thirty-Fifth Street. Feeling confident that I had shaken any tail, I went to the address Joey had given me over the phone. It wasn't a prepossessing building, but I ducked into the narrow tiled hall and started climbing up. I passed the first landing. It smelled even in cold weather. I turned right and went down the hall. At the "G" door I rapped.

"Kelly," I said. "Joey, are you there?"

There was no answer. The door was locked. Maybe, I thought, I have the wrong floor. I turned back toward the "G" door, when I heard a quick, stealthy step behind me. I whirled, but not quite fast enough, the blow struck above my left ear and I sagged downward, out cold before I hit the filthy floor.

When I came to my head felt big as a war drum and the pain in long, quivering throbs. My first idea was to lie where I was for the rest of my life, never move again. And then my brain started to clear. Joey, I thought, I got to find Joey! I staggered onto my feet.

Still rocky, I squinted down the dark hall, and then went to the "G" door.

"Joey," I said, and knocked. There was no answer.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Dead Man's Home

I TRIED the door. It wasn't locked, and I pushed it open. It didn't open very far. I scrunched around and peered in. The reason the door didn't open was that

Joey was lumped on the floor directly in front of it, shot right through the heart. He was still warm, and the blood was wet. But he was dead, dead with an expectant expression still on his face. He'd opened the door, thinking it was me, and they shot him before he could change expression.

I stood looking down at the little guy, and the sickness went out of me and I started to rage. I remembered the hundred times he'd proven his devotion to Tony. I wanted to do something for him, but there was nothing I could do. I couldn't even close his eyes, or put a crucifix in his hand.

Just then I heard a rumpus downstairs. I shut the door and backed out into the hall. I looked over the bannister and down below me was a cop. A uniformed cop.

"Did you hear a shot?" he was asking a tenant. "Have you seen any strangers in the building?"

I drew a long breath. This was pretty! I'd just been seen leaving one corpse last night, and here I was with another. How the devil was I going to get out of the building? Fire escape? Now, that would be cute, a big red-headed man charging down the fire escape of a tenement. That wouldn't create suspicion—not much!

The cop was knocking on the next door, going through the house, investigating. I couldn't get down the stairs without him seeing me, and there was no place to hide. I thought fast; quietly as I could, I made for the door at the farthest end of the hall. I heard a kid yelling inside and a lot of racket. I knocked, and a colossally fat woman, holding one baby, two others crawling behind her, stuck her head out.

"Madam," I boomed out above the howling kid. "I'm from the *Globe*. We've heard there was a shooting; did you hear any shots?"

"What?" she said. "What are you talkin' about?"

"I'm a reporter," I yelled. "It's been reported there was a shooting here."

"Hey!" I turned around, the cop was

coming upstairs. "What are you doin'?" he said.

"Listen," I said. "A guy just told me there'd been a shooting here. Who was killed? I'm Tracy of the *Morning Globe*."

"Beat it," the cop said.

"Aw, give me a break, Officer."

"Scram," he said. "If you want a story go over to the station house and wait for it. Get goin'!"

"Okay," I said, "but it wouldn't hurt you to cooperate a little." I shrugged sulkily and ambled downstairs. The cop watched me go.

OUT on the street, I lingered just long enough to give the cop a picture of a news-hungry and disgruntled reporter. Then I climbed on a trolley. I didn't want any cab drivers coming in with descriptions of a gent leaving the scene of the crime. As we jarred along, I started to think. I knew who killed Northup—I knew who killed Joey! But how was I going to prove it? Then a great white light swept through the vast wastes of my mind.

Evidence! I had evidence. I had a witness! A witness who had seen and talked to Northup's murderer. I danged the old trolley bell and jumped off before the relic came to a full stop. I sailed into the nearest cigar store and got long distance. After a wait I got through to Mr. Silas Poletag.

"Silas," I said, "this is Pat Kelly, and I've got to talk to you. Can you come down tonight? It's vitally important! Come down and register at the Dixon Hotel. I'll look you up. And Silas, don't tell anybody you're coming. Whatever you do don't tell your special operative from Washington."

"Okay," Silas said. "I'll be seeing you."

I warned him again and hung up.

Then I hailed a cab. From now on it was going to be easy!

When we pulled up in front of Tony's I didn't feel so happy. Joey's death would be a blow to her; and that was just half of it.

I found her trailing up and down her white modern drawing room in a silver dress. I would have paid to watch her, but she wasn't putting on any fashion parade.

"Pat," she said, "I want some straight talk. How do you think my compact got to Northup's lodge?"

"I'll ask you one," I said. "Who knew positively that Joey was at Northup's lodge the night of the murder?"

"Bubbles," Tony said, "and you and I, and—" Her voice went dead.

"And," I said, "who tailed me to Joey's hideout, knocked me out while I was looking for his door, found the door, and killed Joey?"

"Killed Joey?" she said.

I nodded.

Then the mask fell. She sat down in a chair and buried her face in her hands. She sat there and cried like a desolate child. The maid put her head in the door but I shooed her away. I mixed a drink for myself and one for Tony. I put it on the table by her.

Pretty soon she lifted her head and sniffed. I started to offer her my handkerchief but she already had it. That made us both laugh. Then she stood up and shook back her hair. She went to her desk, pulled out a drawer and slowly, lovingly, took out a small automatic. With the gun in her hand she turned and looked at me.

"I'm dining with Ronald tonight," she said quietly. And her small fingers slid caressingly down the barrel of the gun.

"I thought you were going to be a lady," I said.

"I'm the last Grigorio," she said.

"All the brains died with Gus," I said.

She looked at me. "You think I'm going to let Ronnie Drew get away with it? He's been in this up to his neck. He was playing me for a blind. Don't you see, Pat? He never loved me!"

"Listen, Tony," I said, "that's why you're killing him. That's when a woman kills—when the man doesn't love her. Or

quits loving her. But you're making a mistake. He does love you—he just got in too deep."

"What do you mean?" she said.

"I mean, he is a typically good-for-nothing son of a prominent father. His ego has been bruised, and torn all his life. Then one day he has a little heart-to-heart with Northup. Northup has ideas; he needs the inside dope Drew can get through his unsuspecting father. But Northup double-crosses him. So Ronnie goes for a showdown and Northup threatens to expose him. Ronnie bumps Northup."

"But my compact—framing me!" Tony said.

"Northup," I said, "sent you to an asylum when you were sane. He was robbing you. No jury would have convicted you, Tony. Ronnie knew that. It saved his neck and he meant to save yours. When he learned today from Bubbles that Joey had been at the lodge, he had to kill Joey."

Tony tightened her grip on the gun. "Joey was the only friend I had," she said slowly. "Ronnie won't get away with this!"

"He won't get away with it," I said. "He'll get life, if he doesn't hang by the neck until dead. We've got him Tony, legally!"

"You're pretty sure of yourself, Pat," she said.

"I'm a great detective," I said. "One day I'm going to catch me a little pickpocket and give her life."

"Catch Ronnie first," she said. And I knew by the bitterness in her tone how much she'd cared for that guy. All the dreams she'd built around him. . . . I didn't like thinking about that.

"Look," I said. "I'm after evidence. I want to take a look-see in Northup's safe. I suggest we dine and wine Bubbles—she has the keys. You get those keys, Tony. I want 'em tonight. And sweetheart, to keep you out of mischief, I'll take the gun."

I slipped it into my pocket.

Tony frowned. "Bubbles isn't as dumb

as she looks, you know," she said calmly.  
"She couldn't be," I said.

"She knows plenty, Pat."

"I hope so," I said. "Let's take her to dinner, pour in the liquor and pump out the evidence."

**W**E PICKED up Bubbles. Upset as she was, she isn't a girl to miss a free meal. I thought she was plenty upset, but she was using her head, planting in our childish minds her deathless affection for Northup. Remembering Northup's short-legged, pot-bellied physique, his bald head, close-set eyes and tremendous snozzle, I thought his attraction for Bubbles couldn't have been all carnal. Beppo Grigorio had been a downright beautiful brute from a dame's angle and Bubbles was balmy about him. I was dead sure she never gave a damn about Northup.

She went easy on the liquor, talked plenty and said nothing. Tony sparred with her in that sweet feline way one female tries to trip another, but Bubbles kept covered. All we got was how wonderful Max had been to her.

We dropped her on the West Side where she said she was staying with her mother. It was such a ratty, run-down, cheap but respectable place, I thought she might actually be staying with her mother.

As we drove back north, Tony handed me a bunch of keys.

"I think they're Northup's," Tony said. "I had no way to be sure, under the table; but they were the only keys she had."

Tony got off at her apartment.

"Take care of yourself, Pat," she said. "Ronnie overestimates your brains."

She stood on the curb and watched me drive off. That wasn't like Tony. The old Grigorio premonition is working tonight, I thought, she thinks I'm walking into danger.

I left the cab several blocks from Northup's building and ankled up on hoof. I looked through the doors, the night porter

having graciously taken himself to remote parts. I took a look at the outside lock, chose the likeliest keys. The second key worked. Quietly I closed the door and slid to the self-service elevator.

At the top floor I studied the lock on the outside steel door. It was a trick business and took two keys, but with their cooperation, I slid the door open and stepped into the pitch dark foyer.

The foyer was an oblong affair; a wide, white lacquered door led into the apartment. I stood by the door and listened—someone was talking in a queer high-pitched voice.

"Yes," the voice was saying, "my good man is out of Dartmoor and a-sendin' for me. It's a nice bit of place we'll take. . . ."

I tiptoed in and flattened myself against the wall. At the far end of the room sitting in a big chair, back to me, was the gray, frizzled female I'd seen on my first visit. Before her, on the coffee table, was a fifth of Scotch and a bottle of champagne. She was absolutely alone.

**A**S I watched, she took a snort of Scotch and washed it down with half a tumbler of champagne. Then she weaved onto her feet unsteadily and trailed toward me, wrapped in what I assumed was Northup's most expensive robe.

"It's just a bit of ermine, I'm wearin'," she said, rolling bleary eyes. "I like a bit of ermine to keep out drafts. I'm not one to let a bit of windfall go to me head—that I am not." She finished the champagne, took a step forward, swayed, and fell flat on her face.

I eased over and looked at her. I took in the empty bottle of champagne and the sinfully low bottle of Scotch. The old lady wasn't going to be in my way—not for hours!

But who was she? What was she celebrating?

Northup's desk stood between the windows. I went through the drawers fast.

Nothing important. Then I trekked into the bedroom.

It was a good-sized room, with a man-sized bed and some easy chairs, a bureau and a dressing table. Except for some hunting prints the oyster-white walls were bare. I opened the closet doors and found it wasn't a closet, but a dressing room, with a large built-in wardrobe. One of the wardrobe doors was open. Several suits had been pushed back on the rod, and gaping at me was a deep recess with a steel door standing wide open. I squatted down and inspected it. It was a good-sized vault and within, row upon row, like brave soldiers, were bottles and bottles of liquor.

I stood up and explored the wall above the vault. Cool steel soothed my eager fingers. A safe, a perfectly simple little number! I figured the upper vault opened on the same combination as the lower, and then experimented. It was slow business, but just as I was breaking into coarse, crude ejaculations, the little door went click. I swung her back and gazed into Max Northup's private safe.

I grabbed the first pack of envelopes and ripped through them—a few names were familiar, but they weren't the names I wanted. I stuffed them back and grabbed another bunch. In a sky blue folder, all neatly lettered, was the last will and testament of Giuseppi Grigorio! I didn't stop to read it, merely made sure it was the original document, and hastily transferred it to an inner pocket. I went through the other papers; found nothing there, and then pried the lid off a long tin box. Lying in solemn grandeur in that box was one lone document. A marriage license. I glanced at it, and started. It was made out to Gus Grigorio, and Mrs. Beppo Grigorio (widow—*née* Joan Jarvis)—Gus and Bubbles! It was dated three weeks before the massacre. I took in the name of the small town and the name of the Justice of the Peace who had performed the ceremony. It was all there in correct legal terminology,

and yet I knew it was completely phony!

GUS GRIGORIO never married Bubbles. He didn't like women, didn't trust them. He was furious when Beppo married her, and bitter after his death. "You can't pull a big-time job," Gus said, "if you're thinkin' about some dame." Bubbles knew how Gus felt and kept plenty out of his way.

I stood looking at that paper and thinking. Had Northup persuaded Bubbles to pose as Gus's widow? Legally, she'd be entitled to a third of his estate, regardless of his will. After his scheme to plant Tony in the asylum failed, had he hit on this idea?

I tucked the license away, and went back to the safe. I took out everything, tested the vault for a false bottom, and sides. It was sound. And there were no bonds! Of course Northup might keep a safe deposit box under an assumed name. But where? How was I going to track it down? And then I thought of Ronnie. If Ronnie married Tony, the Grigorio money would be his. Was that why Northup double-crossed him—pulled the fake marriage certificate? Did Ronnie get wise and blast him?

I piled the stuff back in the safe. I was in a hurry to get down to the Dixon and have a talk with Silas Poletag.

I slid back into the library. Old Souse was peacefully snoring just where she'd dropped. I beat it into the elevator and down. As I pulled the door open I came face to face with the night porter!

"Hello!" I said casually, oh, ever so casually, and started for the street. The porter just stood and stared at me.

It was bitterly cold and starting to sleet. I turned my collar up, pulled my hat down and whistled for a cab.

"Dixon Hotel," I said.

"Yeah?" the driver said. "They're having plenty of excitement down there. I just heard it on the radio."

"Heard what?" I said.

"About the murder. The chief witness in

the Northup case—the guy who identified Kelly was shot to death about an hour ago.”

“What!” I said. My stomach dropped.

“Yeah. They got a dragnet out for this guy, Kelly. They’ll get him.”

“Listen,” I said, and my mouth was stiff. “I don’t want to go to the Dixon; I don’t like murder. Take me—” *Take me where, I thought, where can I go?*

“Oh, the Dixon is safe enough now,” the driver said. “Got about a hundred cops down there.”

“What makes you so sure this guy Kelly did the killing?” I said.

“Easy,” the driver said. “He called Pole-tag and asked him to come down. Asked him not to tell nobody. But, the country boy wasn’t so dumb. He told the sheriff, and he told a cop friend—a cop here in town. He didn’t trust that guy Kelly, an’ no wonder!”

“No wonder,” I said, and I slid down in the seat.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Kelly on the Run

THE driver kept looking in the mirror as he talked. Thank God it was cold. I could keep my collar up—but my red hair? There aren’t too many big guys running with red hair, . . .

“Where do you want to go?” the driver said.

“Alpine House,” I said. It was the biggest commercial hotel I could think of. I might be able to jump out, mix with the crowd—I prayed there’d be a crowd—and then go down the arcade, out the side door. From then on—what? No flop-house would take me—one look and they’d ring headquarters fast. It was below zero and the thermometer was falling, and here I was a wanted man.

A wanted man! And then I remembered the cop out on the South Side who had seen me just before he found Joey. Wow!

He couldn’t have missed finding Joey, and there was no weapon. He’d know it couldn’t be suicide. I was wanted for three—count ‘em—three murders!

We were pulling up under the brilliantly lighted marquee of the Alpine. I pushed a bill through to the driver and jumped out. I was about to swing in to the bar and have a quick one when I saw Barney Glenn, one of the Alpine house dicks, standing at the end of the bar talking to the cashier. I saw him in the mirror. Miraculously, he didn’t see me. I turned left and headed for the street, realizing that there wasn’t a bar in town where I could buy a drink.

I bolted back into that sleet and struck north. It was the coldest night I can remember, the pavements coated with ice, the wind cutting through my clothes like I was a dancer in chiffon. What was I going to do?

If Ronnie were doing a real job, the gun that killed all three was probably already in my room, hidden just carefully enough so some cop would find it. And suddenly I knew what I was going to do. I knew, and I wasn’t cold any more. I set my teeth and walked into that wind thinking with sweet ecstasy what I would do when I got my hands around a certain guy’s throat. I’d choke the truth out of that rat Ronnie Drew if I hung for it!

I wanted to call a cab, but decided not to risk it. I couldn’t take small risks. It wasn’t just myself—there was Tony. Tony would know the whole thing was a frame. That helped me, helped the way I felt, but it was as good as a death warrant for her. She’d sing, and sing loud. It wouldn’t break the beautiful frame Drew had hung on me, but it wouldn’t help Drew. He knew she was already suspicious of him; his nerves were beginning to crack. If you can mow down three, you can mow down four, even if the fourth has to be the woman you’re in love with.

I knew now that I had to get Ronnie before he got Tony.

THE Drew house is one of the few private houses still facing on the lake; a great grey stone castle of a place, set far back on a wide lawn. I swung down the drive across the yard and up onto the veranda. I transferred my rod to my overcoat pocket and rang the bell.

"I want to see Mr. Ronald Drew," I told the long-face butler.

"Just a moment," the butler said. "I will see if Mr. Drew is at home."

"We'll both see," I said, and stepped in close. He looked startled. "Get going," I said, "and don't make any fuss." I shoved the rod into his back.

"Yes, sir," he said, and led the way across an enormous foyer and up an ornate stairway. I stayed with him.

"Nothing will happen to you," I said, "if you play dead."

We went down a red-carpeted hall and he stopped and knocked on a door.

"Come in—"

Oswald opened the door and started to step back but I kept him in front of me. The room was a small study, dimly lighted. I saw the desk, and behind the desk I saw Ronald Drew. I saw the light gleam on his smooth dark hair. I saw his big eyes open in surprise when he saw me. He got to his feet, his girlish white hands clasped before him.

"Kelly," he said in a whisper.

"Yeah," I said. "Keep your hands up and don't press any buttons or reach for a gun. You're all through, Ronnie. You killed Northup. You followed me from Tony's to a South Side tenement, knocked me out and killed Joey Bostelli. You played Federal agent to Silas Poletag. When I telephoned him today he called you and you went to the Dixon and shot him. You've framed me, but you won't profit. I've come to get you, Ronnie!" I took a step forward. His big brown eyes were glassy with fear.

"Kelly," he said hoarsely, "you're wrong, man! For God's sake—I know you're in-

nocent—I—Don't shoot me, Kelly, don't shoot me!"

I stepped nearer the desk, keeping both Drew and the butler in close range, I yanked a piece of paper and pulled out a fountain pen.

"Sit down and start writing," I said. "Start writing your confession. Tell the truth, give names and times."

"Kelly, you're crazy," he said. "My confession won't mean anything after I'm dead—they'll know you forced me."

"Start writing," I said. "You never worried about my angle before. I'll hang for killing you—but I won't hang for crimes I didn't commit."

Ronnie slumped into the chair. "Kelly," he said, "I—I'll confess, but—"

I never heard the end of the sentence. I never heard the step behind me.

When I came to in the aching, galloping darkness I was half-suffocated and still cold. My eyes were taped, my arms were tied under me, my legs were lashed together and a blanket was wound around my head. I knew I was on the floor of a car going hellbent somewhere.

I COULD hear the angry lake lashing the coast, the wind was so strong the big car swayed drunkenly. So they were taking me for a ride! On a night like this they wouldn't even need to wrap me in cement; no man could live long in that thundering, icy water.

But why? My brain was clearing. Why run the risk of bumping me off when the District Attorney was panting to do the same thing legally?

There was only one answer. Something I knew was dangerous. Somewhere I had the finger on Drew. But where?

The car turned into a narrow, rutted lane, plowed along in second, and stopped. The men in front got out. The door behind my head opened and somebody grabbed me by the shoulders and dragged me forward. I played dead.

They must have thought I was still out. They carried me into the house, the blankets still around my head, and dumped me on the floor. Then they exited to the next room and locked the door.

I was stiff as a paralytic, my hands were numb, and my legs felt like dead logs. If only I could get the blanket off my head and breathe! My wrists were lashed with wire that cut so far into the flesh, the blood trickled down my hands.

I lay hour after hour. And then I felt a sudden sharp sweeping draft. I heard the click of the door. I lay perfectly still. I knew something was there staring down at the lump of numbed humanity that was me.

"Kelly!" It was a woman! I heard the click of her high heels; then she knelt beside me and started pulling off the blanket. The cold air was like a tonic, but I didn't move.

"He's dead," the dame shrilled. "You've killed him. Kelly—speak to me! These rats have got me, too!"

It was Bubbles. I recognized her voice behind its tense hysteria. I was lying on my face and she was trying awkwardly to free my hands.

"Kelly," she kept saying in a whisper, "wake up—listen to me."

"Get some pliers," I said. "You're about to amputate both my hands."

"Kelly," she said, "they've got Tony. You got to give up the bonds."

"What bonds?" I said.

"Don't be tough now," she said, "those bonds are no good to you. They'll be no good to Tony when they're through with her. Where are they, Kelly? For God's sake, tell me!"

I flopped over like a walrus. "Tell you," I said, "after that faked marriage certificate!"

"All right," she said. "Listen, you've got to listen. Northup wanted dough. Sure—I played ball with him. What else could I do? Do you think I wanted to be a heap of bones in the Michigan woods? That's

what they do, Kelly—tie you in a chair in a Michigan shack, pour gasoline on your clothes and set fire to you! Northup didn't want to hound Tony. It was Drew."

"I believe you," I said.

"Well, believe some more," she said. "They've got Tony tied in a chair in the next room. Unless you give up the bonds now, they'll torture her until you do."

"Don't be a sap," I said. "I haven't got the bonds."

Bubbles ripped the tape off my eyes. I blinked but I couldn't see much beyond her agonized face. I made out a table above us, a candle on it, the rest of the room was dark. But her face wasn't something you forget in a hurry. She was gray with fear.

"Why do you think you're here?" Bubbles said. "If they didn't know you had the bonds, you'd be in a cell."

"Take my knife and saw easy on these wires," I said. "Is Tony here?"

"They sent her a fake message," Bubbles whispered. "They said you were in a spot, asked her could she meet you. She came and they picked her up. I was in the car. They muzzled her with ether, but it's worn off. They want her conscious, plenty. Sing, Pat, for Tony's sake!"

And out of the dark came a voice. I can't describe it. It came through a speaking system with the silky purr of a devil.

"Mr. Kelly—" the sarcasm was something—"we are sorry to detain you when we know how much your company is desired elsewhere."

"Don't give it a thought," I said. "You've done me a big favor."

**T**HE voice was smooth as a wet seal. "We are prepared to do you more of a favor. All we ask is that you turn in the bonds and property deeds you took from Northup's apartment."

*So, I thought, the night porter sung.*

"If you want those bonds, you better contact Northup on the ouji board," I said.

*(Continued on page 106)*



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## DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 104)

"Quit stalling, Kelly." The voice had a new edge. "We've got you and we have Miss Grigorio. She goes free, unharmed, if you turn over the property—if you're wise, you'll talk fast."

And then my jaw dropped. A new voice came through the dark.

"Don't tell him anything, Pat! I'm not afraid of the rat."

"Tony!" I shouted. They had her.

"It's all right, Pat, don't talk!"

There was a low chuckle, a chuckle that made me colder than the wet cold night.

"Listen, Ronnie," I shouted, "the bonds weren't in Northup's safe. He's got them parked in some safe deposit box."

"How too bad!" the voice purred. "In such circumstances Miss Grigorio will have to go back to the asylum. If you had the property, I know we could come to an understanding. This way, we'll have to renew our guardianship of a girl mentally incapable—"

"She's not incapable," Bubbles said.  
"She's not crazy—you can't send her back there."

"She may be sane tonight," the voice said, "but after tonight—who knows?"

"You fiend," Bubbles screamed. "You can't hurt Tony—what are you going to do?"

"Nothing unbalances the mind of a beautiful woman like losing her beauty." The voice had the ring of madness. "Think, my friends, when she looks in the mirror tomorrow and sees with her remaining eye the blackened stumps of her teeth, the seared gums, her torn slit of a mouth. It's been done before, you know—you take a red hot poker like this—"

"Drop that!" It was Tony. "Drop it!" she screamed. "Pat! Pat don't let him!"

"Ronnie," I yelled, "I'll get you the bonds!" I rolled toward the wall. Bubbles was on her feet racing toward the wall. Bubbles was on her feet racing toward

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## DEATH-DANCE FOR A DEBUTANTE

the communicating door. She threw herself against it, shouting: "Stop, you insane devil—stop!"

There were three quick staccato shots, a pause—an electric silence.

"Open the door," Bubbles screamed. "Pat, they've killed her!"

It seemed an eternity—then the door swung open. Ronnie Drew stood there, a lock of hair hanging damply across his gray face. In his hand was an automatic.

He gestured woodenly toward me. I was against the wall, trying to propel myself onto my feet.

"Untie him," Ronnie said. His voice was toneless. He tossed Bubbles a pair of pliers.

**B**UBBLES swooped down beside me. I never took my eyes from Ronnie's. His were weirdly glazed. There wasn't a sound from Tony. *He's killed her, I thought numbly, he had a gun, not a poker. He went mad and killed her.*

My hands came free, blue, bloated, useless things; then my legs.

"Don't try to stand yet," Bubbles said.

Bubbles got under my shoulder and helped hoist me onto my feet. Propped against the wall I started toward Ronnie, he moved back into the other room like a figure in a dream. I went after him, slowly, holding to the wall, using Bubbles as an outside crutch. I was going to get Ronnie—and after that nothing mattered.

I pulled myself through the doorway. Ronnie had backed to the far side of the room. Tony was there, still lashed in a straight back chair, her head on her chest.

She wasn't dead. She was looking where Ronnie was looking—at the magnificent figure sprawled at her feet—at the smouldering poker still clasped in the aristocratic hand.

"There he lies," Ronnie said, hoarsely. "Public Enemy Number One: Judge Emmet Drew! Crime couldn't exist without men like him! You could rob or murder



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## DETECTIVE TALES

or kidnap if you bought protection from him."

He stopped and looked at Tony.

"The Grigorios were mugs, gangsters, toughs—" Ronnie said shrilly. "They grew up in filth and poverty and slime—but Dad!" He looked at the man on the floor, majestic even in death. The gun slid from his hand. "As a kid," Ronnie whispered, "I idolized him—wanted to look like him, walk like him, talk like him. I remember opening that first box of cigars sent by a cheap wardheeler who was intervening for a powerful friend. 'Give these to your Dad, Sonny, with Hart Meloney's compliments'. I took the cigars to Dad—God, how I remember! They were an expensive brand and I was collecting cigar bands. I opened the box. There lay ten one-thousand dollar bills. 'It's a bribe, Dad,' I shouted. 'That cheap crook is trying to—'"

"Shut up, you little fool," my Dad said, "how do you think a smart man makes his money?"

Ronnie wiped his white face with the sleeve of his coat. "That was the beginning," he said hollowly. "And it grew worse, lower, more horrible each year. I was caught in the middle. He would have killed me before he'd let me go! As his 'no good son,' I could contact disreputable characters, be seen places he didn't dare risk being seen. He made his own son an intermediary between those age-old lovers—crime and power politics."

"Ronnie," Tony said, "your father—sent me away?"

Ronnie nodded. "After Northup told him about Gus's money.. Dad planned the Grigorio massacre because he was afraid of Gus. He'd done him too many favors."

"And Judge Drew killed Max?" Bubbles said.

"Max thought my marriage to Tony was a frame to get the money. He and Dad were both desperate financially; too many pay-offs. He got you to sign the marriage

## DEATH-DANCE FOR A DEBUTANTE

deed. Dad learned of it—thought it was a double-cross."

"Your dad had bad luck," I said, "running into both Silas and Joey that night. It's easy to see why he wanted Tony framed for the Northup killing. With her in the pen, he'd still control her property."

"Ronnie," Tony said softly, "how did your father know where Joey was hiding?"

There was a long silence. Then Ronnie raised his haggard eyes. "I told him Kelly knew where Joey was. It was just a guess—I was bargaining. He could have Joe Bostelli—if he left you out of it, Tony."

"I would rather have been in it," Tony said. "Joey was my friend." She got up and picked up her wraps.

Ronnie watched her, then he turned to me: "I'll write that confession you wanted, Pat. I was with Dad when he killed Poletag. You better drive the girls back in my car."

"Thanks," I said. I followed the girls out into the night. Tony never looked back.

"Kelly," Ronnie said, as he came out and caught my arm. "Take care of her."

Ronnie's car was around at the back. He'd driven up alone after Dréw arrived with the girls. Tony took the wheel.

"Maybe we shouldn't leave him alone," Bubbles said. "He may kill himself!"

"He knows what he wants to do," I said. "He killed his own father."

"But he did it to save Tony," Bubbles said.

"No," I said. "The judge wouldn't torture Tony. He was trying to scare her to make me talk. Ronnie killed him because he's wanted to kill him for a long, long time."

"I've got to get back to the office," Tony said. She talked as if she hadn't heard my conversation with Bubbles. "I've had my boys combing the town for you, Pat, trying to get you safely away."

"You're a loyal little dame," I said.

"Loyal to my friends," she said.



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## DETECTIVE TALES

WE DROPPED Bubbles, and Tony took me on a sightseeing tour of the wholesale district. We parked in a garage and descended into a dimly lit basement.

"Catacombs," I said.

"Arrow Service," she said. She knocked twice on a closed door. A long guy with a longer record opened the door.

"You're just in time, Miss Tony," he said. "We got a funny customer here. Says her man just out of Dartmoor told her to come through us. Knew all the ropes."

My brain clicked. "Where is she?" I asked. And even before I saw the frizzled old souse, I knew the answer!

There she sat, drunk as a billy goat, hugging a bundle that might have been old rags. Only, she was Northup's housekeeper, hugging the Grigorio bonds!

It didn't take us long to relieve her—and Tony coughed up for her legitimate passage to England.

"The bonds are no good to her; they're bearer bonds," Tony said. "But how did she ever nab them?"

"Accidentally," I told her. "She was used to swiping liquor, and the upper safe had the same combination. The poor old gal thought she was rich."

"Listen," Tony said, "you better stay with the boys until we're sure the cops have Ronnie's confession."

"No," I said, "I'm coming with you. We've got things to say. You're a rich woman now and you'd make a wonderful wife."

"Pat," she said, and slapped my hands, "can't you ever be subtle?"

And then she kissed me and ran. I let her go. I didn't even scream for my wallet. After all, there was nothing in it but a pawn ticket for a simple little wedding ring.

And I figured if she wanted it bad enough, she could redeem it herself—which she did!



## THE DEADLY NIGHT

(Continued from page 37)

smothered as Ben jumped on his back like a monkey, his hands covering Al's face. Al lost his balance and fell, and Johnny half fell astride him and hit him three times in the face. Al went limp.

Johnny reached for the gun in Al's shoulder holster. "Watch him."

Ben grinned.

Johnny went below. No tricks. He walked straight into the cabin and pointed the gun at a startled Tony Czuy. Judy gave a cry of relief. "Oh, Johnny—"

"Get his gun and stand over here," Johnny said. She did, he looking straight at Tony. He gave her the gun he'd taken from Al. "Now go up on deck. Ben's up there."

"Johnny. . . ."

"Do as I say!"

She went out. Johnny advanced on Tony. "Two years," he said softly. "You'll be wishing you'd spent them in jail by the time I get through with you—"

A half hour later, Ben was on his way in the skiff after the police. Tony Czuy, battered and bloody, lay tied on one bunk, Al on the other. Johnny checked their bonds. He turned to Judy with a wide grin.

"They'll do. Now let's get out of here. We'll wait on deck for the police." He looked at the sheet of paper on the table. It was Tony's confession of the holdup in which Judy had been innocently involved. "Nice," Johnny nodded.

They went up on deck. "Hold me," Judy said. Her eyes were shining. Johnny held her, talking softly.

"... not right away," he was saying. "Those things take time, and we'd better have a little more money behind us. Maybe next year. You think you'll like Alaska, Judy?"

"I'll love it any place as long as you're there," Judy said. "Now kiss me again and tell me more. Tell me about tomorrow."



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## DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 62)

feet away from me. Get an inch closer and you swallow six inches of steel."

Harry walked over and sat on the cot Helen had occupied. "Got any objection to my taking a nap?" he asked.

Ripper shrugged with indifference.

Elevating his left shoe to the cot, Harry unlaced it, pulled it off and left it sitting on the cot next to him. He repeated with the right, also leaving it on the cot, then put his feet flat on the floor and wriggled his toes.

"Them's kind of beat up high shoes you got," the pock-marked man remarked. "What are you, a farmer?"

"Shop worker. These are safety shoes." He picked one of the heavy, high-topped shoes up by the toe. "They've got steel toes."

And he sent the heavy shoe spinning end-over-end at the man.

Steel glittered in Ripper's hand just as the shoe's steel toe caught him in the chest. He fell backward, righted and flung the knife just as the second shoe caught him full in the face.

A streak of light slithered past Harry's ear as he hurled himself forward. When he reached the other cot, Ripper was leaning on one elbow, groggily fumbling for the gun under his arm.

Winding his fingers into the man's hair, Harry pulled him to a seated position and smashed his fist against the pock-marked jaw.

**SERGEANT DON MURPHY** said, "Stop jittering. They'll be here. The train isn't due to leave for another hour and a quarter."

The plainclothes man Murphy had dispatched to check the waiting rooms returned and reported a woman with crutches and two men answering the descriptions of the gunmen were in one of the side waiting rooms on the mezzanine. Quickly, the sergeant issued instructions to the messenger

## STRANGERS IN THE HOUSE!

and the two other men with him, then moved toward the stairs leading to the mezzanine without hurry. Harry fell into step beside him, and the others followed.

Harry had expected Murphy to surprise the men from behind, but the sergeant calmly walked around in front of them, stopped and flipped back his coat to disclose his badge. He did not draw a gun, but his right hand rested against his belt.

They looked back at him blankly, both started furtive movements toward their armpits, but stopped them almost immediately. Some cold assurance in the homicide man's eyes, a waiting look which edged almost on cruelty, caused them simultaneously to reject the invitation. Slowly they raised their hands level with their shoulders.

As the two men were led away in handcuffs, Harry scooped Helen into his arms, holding her around the shoulders and under the knees as you would a baby.

"We'd have been here sooner, darling," he said. "But Sergeant Murphy wanted to bag Big John Gault, Gerald Crane and a cop named Joe Murphree first. And since he's a night shift cop and this is on his own time, I had to humor him."

Helen wound her arms about his neck. "Take me back to our own apartment," she said simply.



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(Continued from page 6)

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Which about winds up the *Crime Clinic* for this month, friends. We'll be back on the stands May 20th, in the August issue of **DETECTIVE TALES**, along with a lineup of all the best crime-mystery stories we can get for you.

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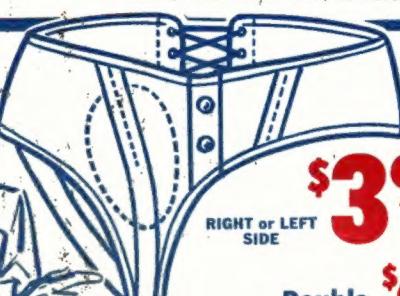
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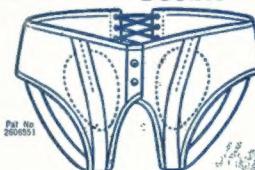
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